



Mission: We champion health equity for Marylanders through advocacy and community collaborations.

Vision: Healthy Marylanders Living in Healthy Communities

SB563 Local Health Departments - Funding
Hearing Date: February 17, 2021
Committee: Budget & Taxation
Position: SUPPORT

Thank you Chairman Guzzone and members of the Budget & Taxation Committee for this opportunity. We submit testimony on behalf of the Maryland Public Health Association to express our support for SB563, Local Health Departments - Funding. This bill's purpose is to bolster funding provided to local health departments as well as provide additional frameworks for spending and evaluation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the gaps within our existing public health infrastructure. In May we saw the effects of unprepared public health departments when Chantee Mack, a 44-year-old employee of Prince Georges County Health Department, died of COVID-19 after a suspected exposure at work. More than 20 of her colleagues also caught the virus and have suffered lasting problems. We must provide departments with the support needed to prevent tragedies like this from happening in the future.

The lack of funding to health departments has been made evident throughout the country. In an interview of over 150 public health officials across the nation and an analysis of local and state health departments, it was found that on every level the system is underfunded and under threat. Dr. Redfield, the former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated in an interview that “our nation failed over decades to effectively invest in public health”. While short term remedies have been provided to address the immediate threat of COVID-19 in Maryland, such as relief received through CARES funding, the long-term increased budget laid out in SB563 goes further to address the weaknesses in our current public health infrastructure.

Beginning in FY 2023 \$70,000,000 will be distributed among the counties. This is an increase of approximately \$20,000,000 from the amount laid out in FY 2018. In combination with this increased funding, the bill will improve preparedness through ensuring the security for the future of public health in Maryland by continuing to prohibit funding from dropping below the amount given in the previous year as well as requiring adjustments proportionate to the population growth and inflation.

The provisions surrounding allocation of funds included in SB563 will ensure counties are using the funding to address identified gaps in our public health infrastructure. Through the required funding for providing personal protective equipment and other materials to prepare for potential communicable disease or public health emergencies, the bill protects Maryland and our healthcare workers from outbreaks of communicable diseases and emergencies. Funds will also go towards data management regarding communicable diseases and other health matters in order to monitor the potential for future outbreaks or spikes in cases. Counties compliance with these regulations will be required to be evaluated and reported to the proper commission within the Maryland General Assembly.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB563.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy

Marylanders living in healthy, equitable communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.