



**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
January 27, 2021**

**Senate Bill 172
Maryland Health Equity Resource Act
Support**

NCADD-Maryland supports Senate Bill 172 – Maryland Health Equity Resource Act. This legislation proposes to create and fund Health Equity Resource Communities to help reduce health disparities throughout Maryland. The Communities will provide grants, tax incentives, and health care provider loan repayment assistance to areas in the state with poor health outcomes that contribute to health inequities.

The manifestation of health disparities is seen in all areas of health care, including with regard to opioid overdoses. Attached to this testimony is an infographic from Maryland’s Opioid Operational Command Center from this past summer with new data showing that the number of Black Marylanders dying of overdoses is sadly catching up with White Marylanders. Also attached are data showing the impact of the social determinants of health on communities of color.

NCADD-Maryland also supports the funding mechanism proposed in this legislation. A one cent per dollar increase in the state alcohol beverage sales tax would be used to support these Health Equity Resource Communities as well as community-based prevention, treatment, and recovery support programs to address substance use and mental health disorders. The last time the alcohol tax was passed – 10 years ago – the benefits included reductions in underage drinking, binge drinking, driving under the influence, and sexually transmitted infections.

Senate Bill 172 proposes a modest tax increase on the one area of our economy that has not suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alcohol retail outlets have seen spikes in sales, which in and of itself is concerning when it comes to the damage that over-consumption of alcohol can create. This bill will help Maryland’s overall public health in several ways and we urge a favorable report.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.