



Maryland  
Hospital Association

## **Senate Bill 172- Maryland Health Equity Resource Act**

**Position: *Support***

January 27, 2021

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

### **MHA Position**

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 172. Marginalized communities in Maryland struggle with social and economic adversity. Limited access to educational opportunities, affordable housing, reliable transportation, healthy food, play spaces, and health care, contributes to poorer health outcomes. Racism adds stresses and other burdens that harm health. The dedicated caregivers in Maryland hospitals see the detrimental impact on the patients they treat and the health of the communities they serve. Caring for the most vulnerable among us is at the heart of our mission each day in Maryland's hospitals. Central to that mission is laser-like commitment to work with their communities and within their own organizations to reduce health disparities, eliminate implicit bias, and support the underserved.

For these reasons, the Maryland Hospital Association supports the SB 172 Maryland Health Equity Resource Act. The first iteration of this initiative, Health Enterprise Zones, proved the benefits of public-private partnerships and targeting resources where they're needed most. Maryland hospitals helped lead some of work done to ensure access to transportation and healthy food, to create jobs, and more. That pilot was associated with a reduction of over 18,000 inpatient stays and a proven model to reduce health care costs.<sup>1</sup> Financial incentives were used to recruit and retain health care practitioners, new health routes were created and access to behavioral health and dental services was expanded through mobile healthcare units.<sup>2</sup> Despite this success, those involved in the pilot identified opportunities to strengthen the initiative moving forward.

SB 172 builds from the lessons of the pilot and establishes a permanent mechanism to continue targeted investments communities around the state. By providing a dedicated funding source, communities will apply for grants and other financial incentives to address poor health outcomes that contribute to inequities by race, ethnicity, disability, and geographic location. The legislation creates a community driven, coalition approach to fundamentally improve the health of a

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<sup>1</sup> Gaskin, D et al. [The Maryland Health Enterprise Zone Initiative Reduced Hospital Cost and Utilization in Underserved Communities](#) Health Affairs No. 10 2018

<sup>2</sup> <https://health.maryland.gov/healthenterprisezones/Documents/HEZ%20Annual%20Report%202016.pdf>

neighborhood. Dedicated funding from a penny increase on the sale of alcohol will not only enable the sustainability of the program and public health improvement.

This Health Equity Resource Communities initiative will direct significant new funding across our state, a critically needed step for Maryland to build healthier communities and address generations of inequity.

For more information, please contact:

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