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SB 172
Maryland Health Equity Resource Act
Joint Hearing of the Senate Budget and Taxation and Finance Committees
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1:00 PM

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. PJC strongly supports SB 172, which would require the Secretary of Health to designate certain areas of Maryland as Health Equity Resource Communities (HERC) and create a HERC Advisory Committee.

While all Marylanders deserve access to high quality and affordable healthcare, the reality is that people of color are less likely to receive preventative health services and more likely to receive lower quality care as compared to their white counterparts.¹ In Maryland, chronic diseases, like hypertension, heart disease and diabetes, have disproportionately impacted communities of color and low-income individuals. Similarly, infant and maternal mortality rates are higher among Black Marylanders than their white counterparts. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the health disparities facing low-income Marylanders and Marylanders of color. SB 172 provides an innovative, evidence-based solution to improve health outcomes and lower healthcare costs and hospital admissions.

The state cannot effectively address health inequities without feedback from underserved communities and health professionals. Meaningful partnerships between the state and underserved communities are needed to help eliminate health disparities in Maryland. SB 172 establishes the HERC Advisory Committee with clinicians, state officials and advocates with expertise in health disparities, prevention services, and clinical research to address the urgent needs of the diverse communities of Maryland. Creating an Advisory Group to guide the develop of this program would ensure that the voices of communities who face significant barriers to attaining good health are heard and valued.

¹ Martha Hostetter, et. al., *In Focus: Reducing Racial Disparities in Health Care by Confronting Racism* (2018), <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/newsletter-article/2018/sep/focus-reducing-racial-disparities-health-care-confronting>.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **SUPPORTS SB 172** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. Should you have any questions, please contact Ashley Black at (410) 625-9409, ext. 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.