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SB 5

Public Health – Implicit Bias Training and the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee February 2, 2021 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 5, which would require the Maryland Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities (OMHHD) to update and publish its public health data that includes race and ethnicity every 6 months. The bill would also provide additional funding to OMHHD and require it to identify and approve implicit bias training programs for licensure and certification for health occupations.

Timely and accurate health data is crucial to eliminating racial disparities in health outcomes. At one time, OMHHD maintained and reported data on certain chronic health conditions by race and ethnicity as well as statistics on Marylanders with limited English proficiency. However, that data became severely outdated and unusable in the state's efforts to reduce and eliminate racial disparities in Maryland. Though the website now houses recent COVID-19 data related to race and ethnicity, the most recent health data related to race and ethnicity for other health conditions is from 2013. By failing to collect and publish recent health data, OHMMD cannot meet its mission to address social determinants of health, eliminate health disparities and guide policy decisions on behalf of the state. Likewise, Maryland cannot address the health disparities that COVID-19 has created and exacerbated without this data. SB 5 will finally hold OMHHD accountable for keeping state officials and community members informed on health disparities in Maryland.

OHMMD needs additional funding to continue its work of achieving health equity in Maryland. OHMMD envisions a Maryland where "all individuals and communities have the opportunity and access to achieve and maintain good health."¹ However, the Office currently relies on limited federal and special funding to supplement its state funding.

¹ Maryland Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, <https://health.maryland.gov/mhhd/Pages/home.aspx> (last visited on January 21, 2021).

SB 5 would require the Governor to appropriate a portion of the Department of Health's total budget to OHMMD. This funding demonstrates a commitment from the State to address health disparities and would enable OHMMD to increase its community outreach and education efforts, technical assistance and training to health providers, and data collection.

Implicit bias training can help reduce health disparities among patients. In the United States, 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.² They also are more likely to have worse health outcomes for certain health conditions.³ Research supports that implicit bias, subconscious assumptions that we make about the world around us, can negatively impact the way that clinicians provide care to patients and discuss treatment options. Compounding these factors are the many barriers to healthcare that disproportionately affect people of color, such as segregation in low-income neighborhoods that have poor housing, limited access to healthy food, insufficient transportation options, and few nearby health provider locations. By requiring healthcare professionals to complete evidence-based implicit bias training, SB 5 recognizes that we cannot eliminate racial disparities in health outcomes without first addressing the implicit bias that plagues our healthcare system. By passing this bill, Maryland would be joining the state of California which signed into law a bill that requires implicit bias training for health care providers.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **SB 5**. If you have any questions, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.

² 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>.

³ *Id.*