



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 5 – Public Health – Implicit Bias Training and the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities

Sponsor: Senators Griffith, Benson, Ellis, Kelley, Washington, and West

February 2, 2021

DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

Position: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports Senate Bill 5, which would require the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities to publish health data that includes race and ethnicity information collected by the Office and to provide updates at least every 6 months. It would also require the Governor, beginning in fiscal year 2023, to include an appropriation of at least \$1,788,314 in the annual budget bill for the Office and would require the Cultural and Linguistic Health Care Professional Competency Program to identify and approve certain implicit bias training programs.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought to the forefront of the American consciousness a hard truth that has existed since the founding of this country: minorities, and especially African-Americans, are systematically denied equal access to health care and suffer as a result. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that minorities are at a higher risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19 for the following reasons:

- **Discrimination:** Minorities experience systematic exclusion and limited access to, housing, education, finance, among other vectors.
- **Healthcare Access:** Minorities are more likely to be uninsured and are more likely to distrust the government and healthcare systems due to historical events such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study that forcibly sterilized African-American men without their knowledge or consent.
- **Occupation:** Minorities form a disproportional percentage of essential workers, thereby increasing exposure risk.
- **Education, Wealth, and Income Gap:** Minorities are less likely to receive high quality education, limiting access to job opportunities and in turn leaving them little choice but to continue working in industries or jobs that increase their risk of exposure.
- **Housing:** Minorities make up a high percentage of urban populations, which in the case of a pandemic, increases their risk of virus transmission simply based on the increased population density.

Given these facts, it is no wonder Indigenous Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian Americans are all more likely than their White American counterparts to contract COVID-19, be hospitalized as a result, or to die from the virus.

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Senate Bill 5 would allow us to begin to address some of these health inequities. The bill would require regular updates and public posting of certain health data including race and ethnicity. It would also provide an appropriation for the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities and would require the Cultural and Linguistic Health Care Professional Competency Program to identify and approve certain implicit bias training programs. All of these are crucial steps in mitigating the effects of health inequities imposed on minorities and is necessary for the economic prosperity of not just minorities but all Marylanders.

The GBC published a report *Gaining a Competitive Edge: Keys to Economic Growth and Job Creation in Maryland* to outline our organization's findings of policies and strategies that would position Maryland to compete in the global economy. One of those pillars was **strategic and effective state investments in business growth**. In our view, investments in the health of Marylanders is an investment in business growth. Employees are the backbone of all businesses, and investing in health care solutions for the Marylanders that make up the workforce is a direct benefit for businesses.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 5.

Click [here](#) for a comprehensive list of the GBC's 2021 legislative priorities.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.