



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Finance Committee

January 26, 2021

Senate Bill 168 Public Health – Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, Senator Eckardt, and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 168 Public Health – Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee.

MRHA and its members support this legislation that establishes the Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee to identify and address the factors contributing to suicide deaths and facilitate system changes to prevent suicide. The critical data generated and filed by this committee would greatly improve the ability of county health departments and providers to implement essential services and programs to address the causes of suicide fatality in their respective counties. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that behavioral health efforts be enacted to minimize the harmful mental health effects of this pandemic on rural residents and beyond.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Maryland law states that “many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitations, and economic development infrastructure.” (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b)

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

Lara Wilson, Executive Director, larawilson@mdruralhealth.org, 410-693-6988