



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Finance Committee

February 2, 2021

Senate Bill 52 Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity (The Shirley Nathan–Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, Senator Washington, and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 52 Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity (The Shirley Nathan–Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021).

MRHA supports this legislation that forms a commission to study and provide advice on issues of racial, ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic health disparities using a health equity framework. This commission would include representatives from a number of general assembly committees, thereby increasing the diversity of proposed solutions to complex barriers to health care. Further, the commission will use a data driven approach to illuminate a wide range of disparities faced by communities across Maryland and will utilize this data to inform on potential solutions to address these disparities.

This legislation is an important step, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic to target solutions to the myriad of health disparities experienced by rural Marylanders 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. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

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.

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

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