



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

January 26, 2021

House Bill 309 Public Health – Data – Race and Ethnicity Information

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Lewis, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in **SUPPORT** of House Bill 309 Public Health – Data – Race and Ethnicity Information.

This legislation would improve and expand the composition of race and ethnicity data on individuals who hold a license or certificate issued by a health occupations board, rather than only physicians. This enhancement of accessibility and compiling of race and ethnicity data would greatly contribute to analysis on the social determinants of health and specifically how race and ethnicity affect health equity.

In rural Maryland, this data collection would help to inform on program implementation and decision making involving our racial and ethnic minority migratory and seasonal worker populations. It is critical to employ data driven approaches to serve these populations to fully understand specific barriers to quality healthcare and the racial and ethnic makeup that influence unique health challenges.

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.

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. MRHA 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