



HOUSE BILL 1083
County Health Officers – Procedures and Oversight

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**
Laurence Polsky, MDH, MPH, Health Officer, Calvert County Health Department
For the Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO)
Position: Oppose – March 9, 2021

HB 1083 would create a new oversight board within each jurisdiction to determine under what circumstances a local Health Officer and Health Department staff may perform inspections of businesses suspected of violating health standards.

The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) is a consistent advocate for appropriate and unbiased health and safety protections. Enforcement of public health measures protect workers, customers, and in many instances, the long-term economic interests of industry sectors. As a result, the state's Health Officers **strongly oppose HB 1083** as a measure that would leave Marylanders at greater risk.

This bill would limit the ability of public health professionals to make real-time decisions necessary to preserve health and safety of workers and residents of their jurisdictions. COVID-19 has demonstrated the need to continually adapt to evolving scientific knowledge. Infectious disease protocols and subsequent actions must be adjusted quickly to protect members of our communities. These decisions are best made by the health professionals and epidemiologists at the Maryland Department of Health and Local Health Departments. Adding another bureaucratic layer to the process, as HB 1083 would mandate, especially in times of rapidly shifting scientific knowledge, leaves the lives of constituents at unnecessary risk.

HB 1083 also has the potential to interject special interest interference into what should be unbiased health decisions. Health Officers are intentionally hired as state employees to provide a layer of distance from local special interests. By mandating that local business owners have a role in approving the scope of Health Officer authority, the intent of shielding health and safety enforcement from undue local conflicts of interest is undermined.

Health Officers currently have both state level (the MDH Secretary and Public Health Deputy Secretary) and local (Board of Health) oversight. Business interests already have the ability to request review of enforcement actions if there are concerns. The additional Oversight Board mandated by this bill serves little practical benefit and would come at the price of delayed action leaving people at risk of harm.

For these reasons and more, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers are compelled to **testify in opposition to HB 1083**. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*