



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

January 26, 2021

House Bill 78 Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity (The Shirley Nathan – Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021)

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 78 Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity (The Shirley Nathan – Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021).

This legislation would require the State to establish the Maryland Commission on Health Equity to employ a health equity framework by taking a collaborative approach to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequities in the State and incorporating health considerations into broad-based decision making.

MRHA advocates for quality and accessible health care for all rural Marylanders and recognizes the role of the social determinants of health, including racial and ethnic background, that contribute to sustaining barriers to equitable health care. Specific to rural Maryland is the population of migratory and seasonal workers and their families that are recruited to become the crab pickers, landscapers, farm workers, caregivers, and others whose work is essential for the maintenance of the state's economy. The data collected by the Maryland Commission on Health Equity will be able to inform on data driven approaches to increase health equity for these populations and other sub populations within rural Maryland. MRHA believes this legislation and the employment of a comprehensive health equity framework to analyze deep causes of health inequities would greatly benefit Maryland's rural populations.

Further, 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.

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