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## **Support**

### **House Bill 1148 – Secretary of Health – School-Based Health Centers – Guidelines and Administration of Grants**

House Health and Government Operations Committee

March 2, 2021

The Maryland Assembly on School-Based Health Care (MASBHC) strongly supports *House Bill 1124- Secretary of Health – School-Based Health Centers -Guidelines and Administration of Grants*. The bill will transfer the responsibility of administering the school-based health center (SBHC) program from the Maryland State Department of Education to the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health under the Maryland State Department of Health.

#### ***Why is this legislation critical?***

SBHCs provide basic health services in public schools with high concentrations of poverty. All SBHCs provide basic primary care, and now many SBHCs also provide behavioral health services in response to the number of children facing behavioral health crisis. Some SBHCs also provide dental services, particular in rural regions where there is a shortage of pediatric dental providers.

SBHCs should be a part of the public health infrastructure, as they can reach children in communities that are disenfranchised from the health care system. However, there is limited integration of SBHCs in larger public health efforts. This problem has become evident in the State's COVID-19 response. Most SBHCs were shuttered because of MSDE's outdated restrictions on the use of telehealth. This means that children have been denied health care services during the most serious health crisis of our lifetime.

There are pockets of poverty in every jurisdiction in Maryland, and yet only 13 jurisdictions have SBHCs. We need to increase the reach of SBHCs to ensure every child has access to basic health care services. State funding for school-based health centers has been flat at \$2.5 million for almost two decades. This limited funding only provides support for a small number of Maryland's 86 SBHCs.



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SBHCs are currently located in the following jurisdictions: Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Caroline, Dorchester, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, and Wicomico Counties.

To support the expansion of SBHCs, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future contains an additional \$6.5 million for SBHCs. We need public health leadership to ensure this funding is implemented effectively and reaches the communities with the greatest needs. The Maryland Department of Health is the State agency in the best position to lead SBHCs into the future.

### **Why should SBHCs be under the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health**

SBHCs serve children, and therefore, SBHC policy should be aligned with the State's broader public health initiatives for children. The Bureau of Maternal and Child Health is under the Prevention and Health Promotion Administration of MDH.

The proposed transfer will allow the State to better align SBHC policy with public health initiatives including:

- vaccination outreach strategies;
- preventive and primary care services for children;
- services for children with special health care needs that are family-centered and community-based;
- chronic disease prevention and management, including diabetes, asthma, and hypertension;
- tobacco prevention initiatives; and
- oral health initiatives for children, including sealant programs

### ***Conclusion***

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. We ask for a favorable report. In this critical health moment for our state, we need to ensure Maryland's public health strategies fully utilize school-based health centers. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Robyn Elliott at [relliott@policypartners.net](mailto:relliott@policypartners.net) or (443) 926-3443.