



TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE ECONOMIC MATTERS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 309 – PUBLIC HEALTH – DATA – RACE AND ETHNICITY INFORMATION

Sponsors: Delegates Pena-Melnyk and R. Lewis

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**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports House Bill 309, which would require the Maryland Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities to collaborate with the Maryland Health Care Commission to publish a report card that includes racial and ethnic composition data on individuals who hold a license or certificate issued by a health occupations board, rather than only physicians. It would also require the Office, as permitted by certain privacy laws, to respond to requests for health data that includes race and ethnicity information within 30 days of receipt of the request.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought to the forefront of the American consciousness a hard truth that has existed since the founding of this country: minorities, and especially African-Americans, are systematically denied equal access to health care and suffer as a result. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that minorities are at a higher risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19 for the following reasons:

- **Discrimination:** Minorities experience systematic exclusion and limited access to, housing, education, finance, among other vectors.
- **Healthcare Access:** Minorities are more likely to be uninsured and are more likely to distrust the government and healthcare systems due to historical events such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study that forcibly sterilized African-American men without their knowledge or consent.
- **Occupation:** Minorities form a disproportional percentage of essential workers, thereby increasing exposure risk.
- **Education, Wealth, and Income Gap:** Minorities are less likely to receive high quality education, limiting access to job opportunities and in turn leaving them little choice but to continue working in industries or jobs that increase their risk of exposure.
- **Housing:** Minorities make up a high percentage of urban populations, which in the case of a pandemic, increases their risk of virus transmission simply based on the increased population density.

Given these facts, it is no wonder Indigenous Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian Americans are all more likely than their White American counterparts to contract COVID-19, be hospitalized as a result, or to die from the virus.

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House Bill 309 would allow the State to begin to address some of these health inequities. The bill specifically calls for the Maryland Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities to assist the Maryland Secretary of Health in identifying, coordinating, and establishing priorities for programs, services, and resources that the State should provide for minority health and health disparities issues. It also requires the review of existing laws and regulations to ensure that they facilitate the provision of adequate health care to the minorities of Maryland. The GBC believes that this type of targeted action plan is important to address Maryland's health disparities.

The GBC published *Gaining a Competitive Edge: Keys to Economic Growth and Job Creation in Maryland* to outline policies and strategies that would position Maryland to compete in the global economy. One of those pillars is **strategic and effective state investments in business growth**. GBC contends that investments in the health of Marylanders is an investment in business growth. Employees are the backbone of all businesses, and investing in health care solutions for the Marylanders that make up the workforce is a direct benefit for businesses.

GBC's 2021 Legislative Priorities cites a need to **advocate for inclusive policies and programs that strengthen economic competitiveness and job creation**. Combatting health care inequities that prevent minorities from being full participants in the workforce would broaden the talent pool for employers and give potential employees the ability to have a positive impact on the Maryland economy.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on House Bill 309.

Click [here](#) for a comprehensive list of the GBC's 2021 legislative priorities.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.