



Maryland Alliance for
Racial Equity in Education

Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 1148 – Secretary of Health – School-Based Health Centers – Guidelines and Administration of Grants

Health and Government Operations Committee
March 2, 2021

Dear Honorable Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE) is pleased to provide favorable testimony for House Bill 1148, Secretary of Health – School-Based Health Centers – Guidelines and Administration of Grants. MAREE is a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland's education system.

Our coalition is in agreement with transferring the responsibility of administering the school-based health center program from the Maryland State Department of Education to the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health under the Maryland State Department of Health (MDH).

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) as a safety-net health care delivery model for populations that are uninsured, underinsured, or represent populations who do not have access to health care. SBHCs are an essential, research-based strategy for increasing access to services which reduce health outcome disparities. They provide primary medical, mental/behavioral, dental, and vision care in public schools with high concentrations of poverty. Provision of these services at school, where young people spend most of their waking time, increases their access to care and enables them to better engage with learning opportunities.

Disparities in access to health care insurance and services have long been documented. Maryland's Health Care Disparities Policy Report Card 2010 cited ratios of lack of insurance coverage by race with Black Marylanders being twice as likely than White Marylanders to lack coverage and Hispanic and Latino Marylanders being five times as likely as White Marylanders to lack insurance coverage.

SBHCs serve children and in Maryland in particular Black, Latino, Hispanic and low-income children who are more likely to experience lower rates of insurance and health care disparities related to policies and practices. MAREE supports aligning SBHCs with the State's broader public health initiatives for children by moving them to the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health under the Prevention and Health Promotion Administration of MDH. Expansion of access to services is an essential strategy for creating equitable educational outcomes for Maryland's Black, Hispanic, Latino, and Indigenous students, and their families, particularly those experiencing poverty. However, it is a first and not a final step. Our expectation is that the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health will engage in deliberative processes to advance racial equity in delivery of services, inclusion of the community voice in the planning process, and staffing diversity and cultural competencies.

An example of the limited integration of SBHCs in larger public health efforts became evident in the State's COVID-19 response. Most SBHCs were shuttered because of MSDE's outdated restrictions on

the use of telehealth, despite MSDE's reference to utilizing tele-health services through SBHCs in its Maryland Together, [Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education](#). This means that children, disproportionately Black have been denied health care services during the most deadly global public health crisis of our lifetime.

Alternatively, the Maryland Council on Advancement of School-Based Health Centers located at MDH [issued comprehensive recommendations](#) Regarding School-Based Health Centers and Public Health Emergencies and/or Long-Term School Closures on the essential role of SBHCs in providing services and coordinated care during this significant health crisis.

The evidence is clear, management and governance of school based health centers has been misplaced at MSDE. The Maryland Department of Health is the State agency in the best position to lead SBHCs into the future.

To improve and expand coordinated and comprehensive care for our state's most vulnerable populations MAREE strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 1148.

For more information contact: Shamoyia Gardiner at Shamoyia@strongschoolsmaryland.org