

**HB 78 – Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity
(The Shirley Nathan-Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021)**

Position: *Support*

Bill Summary

HB 78 establishes the Maryland Commission on Health Equity. The Commission is charged with, among other items:

- Establishing a state plan to eliminate health inequities for minorities and to recognize the right to equal opportunity for a healthy life for all minority and vulnerable communities and elevate health equity to the level of civil rights concerns;
- Creating a vital platform for action by acknowledging the problem of health inequity and by ensuring that health inequity is measured and monitored;
- Leading and coordinating public efforts to establish health equity surveillance systems for routine measuring and monitoring of health inequity and the social determinants of health;
- Acting as a resource for legislators, public officials and policymakers to promote policy addressing health inequities and evaluate the health equity impact of legislation, policies, regulations, and programs; and
- Establishing and enforcing health equity standards for measuring, monitoring, evaluating and correcting progress toward achieving health equity.

Bill Rationale

The Maryland Health Equity Commission's (MHEC) overall purpose is to serve as the chief advocate for health equity as the State strives to achieve better health for everyone. In this role, the Commission would seek to promote, educate, collaborate with the community, dismantle structural inequities, optimize the outcomes of each patient-provider encounter, and pursue social justice especially for vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Inequities in health arise because of the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The conditions in which people live and die are, in turn, shaped by political, social, and economic forces. Social and economic policies have a determining impact on whether a child can grow and develop to full potential and live a flourishing life, or whether the child's life will be blighted.

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be healthy. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education, housing, safe environments, and health care.

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Health inequalities are disparities in health, reflecting either differences in access to a range of promotional, preventive, curative, or palliative health services or differences in outcomes including disability, morbidity, and mortality spanning physical, mental, and social health. The causes of inequalities in health are dynamic and reflect multiple determinants. Health inequities, however, are differences in health that are judged to be avoidable, unfair, and unjust.

The Maryland Health Equity Commission will advise the Department on health equity issues, focusing on alignment, education, and capacity-building for state and local health programs and community-based organizations. We believe that this commission is needed to promote health and eliminate health disparities in Maryland.

For the above stated reasons, we request a ***favorable*** vote on HB 78.