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

SUPPORT

House Health and Government Operations Committee January 26, 2021

Good Afternoon Chairwoman Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. I am Karen Kalla, Executive Council Member and lead advocacy volunteer for AARP MD. AARP Maryland is one of the largest membership-based organizations in the state, encompassing almost 850,000 members. **AARP MD overwhelmingly supports HB 78 Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity 3 (The Shirley Nathan–Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021).**

AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

HB 78 establishes the Maryland Commission on Health Equity. The Commission in coordination with the State Designated Health Information Exchange must establish an Advisory Committee to make recommendations on data collection, needs, quality, reporting, evaluation, and visualization for the Commission to carry out its purpose. Inequality hurts us all—not just those who face disparities.

In countries like the U.S. where inequality is the most extreme, we see higher rates of obesity, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease especially for people over 50 and across all income levels. We know that by closing these gaps in health alone, we could add trillions of dollars of GDP in the coming years, not to mention creating longer, happier, more productive lives for millions of people.

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has exposed the vast shortcomings within our health system and the critical importance of affordable health coverage and care for all people and all families. Gaps in health and healthcare exist in Maryland and across the United States that lead to inequitable outcomes referred to as “health disparity impacts.”

Real Possibilities

A coordinated collection of key impactful resources designed to gain a better understanding of the issue and what Marylanders of color face is essential in disclosing, defining, and addressing health disparities. Creating a Maryland Commission on Health Equity will provide these resources and contribute to the health and wellbeing of underserved communities and to the enrichment of all Marylanders.

For these reasons, AARP supports HB 78. For questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.