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SB 563

February 17, 2021

TO: Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

RE: SENATE BILL 563 – Local Health Departments – Funding

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 563.

SB 563 increases the funding for local health departments' core public health services and expands the definition of core public health services to include several new categories including personal protective equipment for staff and information technology needs.

BCA has continually advocated for increased state funding for LHDs realizing these agencies are relied upon to address both day-to-day and acute threats to public health. COVID-19 shines a direct light on the role LHDs play in not only containing pandemics, but also ensuring equitable access to healthcare. Unfortunately, COVID-19 also means that LHDs are very stressed for resources including everything from staff to personal protective equipment to access to medical treatment options. To be clear, LHDs have assumed responsibility for testing and vaccinating our residents for COVID-19 in addition to providing services like monitoring for other acute communicable diseases, opioid overdose prevention, food facility licensing, and dentistry for vulnerable populations, among many other items.

At present, LHDs overwhelmingly rely on state core funding to support essential public health services and public health infrastructure. As alluded to above, Baltimore City uses core funding to support several expansive service areas including communicable disease, environmental health, family planning, maternal and child health, wellness promotion, adult health and geriatric health, and administration and communication services.

By adjusting core funding, per capita spending on local public health will increase and LHD performance across core public health services will also improve as LHDs are able to reinvest in core services. This reinvestment includes the enforcement of laws and regulations, linkage of residents to needed health services, and investigation of health problems. More importantly, increased investment in public health infrastructure through increased core funding will also lead to an increased ability to respond to public health emergencies across the state including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2019, BCA, alongside the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) and numerous local health departments, vehemently supported Senate Bill 645 (“Local Health Services Funding – Modifications”), writing, “Restoring and reinvesting in core public health resources will increase LHDs’ capacity to respond to large scale outbreaks and emerging infectious diseases.” With SB 563, the General Assembly again has the opportunity to ensure better safeguards against future acute communicable disease outbreaks and also a better response to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 563.