

To Finance Committee Members:

I am writing to urge you to reject SB 840. The bill not only contains the same COVID-19 vaccine passport provisions as SB 839, but it also requires the use of taxpayer money to promote and incentivize vaccination. While the MyIR Mobile App is currently a voluntary system, it is an inappropriate function of the government to contribute to regulating access to venues, events, and services based on vaccination status. Standardizing a COVID-19 vaccine passport system is a state-sponsored endorsement of COVID-19 vaccine mandates and discrimination.

Many states have already prohibited such vaccine passports and I believe that Maryland would be wise to oppose this bill. Cities that implemented vaccine passport systems, such as New York City, were not able to slow the spread of COVID during the Omicron wave. Even if implemented with good intentions, the vaccine passport systems are not an effective mitigation measure.

Beyond that, they will segregate our society based on vaccination status, which will have the unintended consequence of segregating our society based on race and class. Even if it is not its intention, this bill will have a disparate impact on black, brown, and lower-class Marylanders and prevent them from fully participating in community life. That is a step backward that our state cannot support.

Finally, I believe that this bill is a violation of the principles of medical freedom laid out established in the Nuremberg Code in 1947 after the terrible acts that took place at the hands of the Nazi regime in the name of science. The first of ten points begins as follows: "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential. This means that the person involved should have legal capacity to give consent; should be so situated as to be able to exercise free power of choice, without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, overreaching or other ulterior form of constraint or coercion; and should have sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the elements of the subject matter involved as to enable him to make an understanding and enlightened decision."

Even if the MyIR Mobile App is a voluntary program, it is still a form of state-sponsored coercion that is attempting to make it more difficult for individuals to make a free choice regarding vaccination. Many people have legitimate religious, philosophical, medical, scientific, and logical reasons why they do not want to participate in a mass vaccination experiment in which the potential long-term side effects are unknown.

SB 840 also requires the Maryland Department of Health to submit a plan to the legislature which must include items such as measures to increase vaccination rates among the unvaccinated, even though many of these individuals have made an informed consent decision to remain unvaccinated or may have superior immune protection in the form of natural immunity. At this point, virtually everyone is aware of the COVID-19 vaccine and boosters. It is not a prudent use of taxpayer money to continue to promote and incentivize vaccine uptake.

Finally, bill also allows pharmacists to delegate vaccine administration to pharmacy technicians who have completed a six-hour training course. This is not adequate training for vaccine administration when adverse events can occur, even if the rates of adverse events are low. Finally, the Maryland Medical Assistance Program provides

Medicaid benefits. The provisions of this bill lay the groundwork for discrimination against unvaccinated individuals who rely on Medicaid for their health coverage, as these people would be excluded from these incentives.

I do not believe that it would be wise for the legislature to support SB 840. We have seen during this pandemic that people are voting with their feet and leaving areas that have already experimented with vaccine passport systems, such as California and New York, for states where individual freedom and autonomy are respected and protected. A Maryland with a vaccine passport system is a weaker Maryland, a more totalitarian Maryland, a more segregated Maryland, and a more divided Maryland. As leaders of this state, I call on you to reject SB 840 and protect the freedom of all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Justin Kuk
Baltimore, Maryland