



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 15, 2023

SB281

Commission on Public Health – Establishment

Senate Finance Committee

Position: Favorable

The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 281 establishes the Commission on Public Health to make recommendations to improve the delivery of foundational public health services in the State. The Bill requires the Commission to conduct an assessment of the capability of the Maryland Department of Health and local health departments to provide foundational public health services to state residents. The assessment is to be completed on or before October 1, 2024. The bill requires the assessment to consider the State's response to COVID-19 and overdose deaths, and to racial and ethnic disparities in maternal mortality and birth outcomes in the State. Furthermore, the bill requires the Commission to submit a report on or before October 1, 2025 to the Governor and specific Legislative Committees with their finding and recommendations.

One of the most important roles of government is to make sure their citizens are safe and protected. This role is tested when widespread public health concerns and issues threaten its citizens. As we observed recently with the COVID pandemic, government played a large role in the health crisis. It is important to assess how the government handled a particular situation to help them improve in the future. The bill in question will research how to improve the delivery of public health services in various fields. These fields include, Communicable Diseases, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, Environmental Public Health, Maternal, Child, and Family health, and Access to and Linkage with Clinical Care.

According to Maryland's Department of Health, close to 16,000 Marylanders have died due to COVID.¹ This Commission's efforts could go a long way in helping prevent similar outcomes in the future.

Asthma, Cancer, Heart Attacks, and Life Expectancy are just some of the issues that will be studied under this Commission's responsibility to examine Environmental Public Health Issues. Currently, Marylanders have a higher life expectancy than the average United States life expectancy.² As it relates to asthma, In 2018, there were 3,113 asthma-related hospitalizations in Maryland, totaling \$27.7 billion in healthcare costs.³ According to the Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), in 2020 3.6% of Maryland adults had a diagnosis of angina or coronary heart disease, 3.4% of Maryland adults have experienced a heart attack (myocardial infarction) at some point in their life, and 2.8% have experienced a stroke at some point in their life.⁴ Heart disease is the number one cause of death in Maryland.⁵ The statistics show that more work needs to be done. Having the Commission study these health issues to determine how to help improve health outcomes is in the best interest of all Marylanders.

As it relates to Maternal Health, Maryland's Maternal Death Rates were lower than the national rate, after being consistently higher than the national rate in previous years. However, there is still a large disparity between the rates among Black non-Hispanic and White non-Hispanic Women when it comes to maternal deaths. While the overall maternal death rate is decreasing, the disparities are increasing.⁶ The Maryland Catholic Conference will always stand up for life and the efforts to make sure that Women have a safe environment to bring life into this world. The Commission's work will be helpful in this endeavor.

The statistics show that this Commission is necessary to study how to improve foundational public health services to state residents. This Commission will go a long way in helping improve the health and welfare of Marylanders. For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on SB281. Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/>

² <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/OEHFP/EH/Pages/LifeExpectancy.aspx>

³ <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/OEHFP/EH/Pages/Asthma.aspx>

⁴ <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/heart/Pages/about.aspx>

⁵ <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/heart/Pages/about.aspx>

⁶ <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/mch/Documents/MMR/HG%20%C2%A7C2%A72013-1207%2013-1208%20and%20%C2%A713-1212%20-%20Maryland%20Maternal%20Mortality%20Review%202020.pdf>