



SENATE BILL 281

Commission on Public Health - Establishment

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Laurence Polsky, MD, MPH, Calvert County Health Officer

For the Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) Position:

Support with Amendments – February 15, 2023

The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) is in support of SB 281 as amended in the House of Delegates (HB 214). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the public health infrastructure at both the local and state levels struggled to meet the needs of Marylanders. Chronic underfunding and pay scales that lapsed significantly behind comparable positions in the private sector and federal government resulted in agencies that were understaffed and lacked the capacity to adequately address acute and chronic diseases. In addition, state and local agencies were strapped with outdated IT systems that were insufficient to track or efficiently report data ranging from cancer to overdoses to health disparities. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the strain at both the Maryland Department of Health and local health departments (LHDs).

The Commission proposed under SB 281 provides an opportunity to systematically study the strengths and weaknesses of our public health system. This review should set the framework for strategic improvements at both state and local levels. The Health Officers appreciate this step forward and agree with the amendments from the House that:

- Provide local health department representation from one rural, one suburban, and one urban jurisdiction
- Streamline the composition of the Commission to allow more focused and timely work
- Advance the reporting date of the Commission to December 2024

The parameters set forth by the amended House version of the bill will ensure diversity of input from historically underrepresented demographics across the state, including racial minorities and rural regions that struggle with access to care. The amended bill will also allow members of the Commission to focus on the most critical needs in Maryland's public health infrastructure and match relevant experts to specific workgroups.

Unnecessary delays in the findings of the Public Health Commission come at the cost of health and lives of Maryland's residents. The state's health officers applaud the willingness of the House of Delegates to advance the Commission's reporting date to December 2024. We hope the Senate agrees with this schedule.

For these reasons MACHO supports SB 281 with the amendments approved by the House of Delegates. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, Executive Director, MACHO, at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433.