



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 15, 2023

The Honorable Melony G. Griffith
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 281 – Commission on Public Health - Establishment - Letter of Support with Amendments

Dear Chair Griffith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this Letter of Support with Amendments for Senate Bill (SB) 281 – Commission on Public Health - Establishment. SB 281 will establish a Commission on Public Health charged with assessing the State's response to COVID-19, overdose deaths, and the racial and ethnic disparities in maternal mortality and birth outcomes in the State, as well as the foundational services and capabilities of the state and local health departments (LHDs). This bill will require a report of the Commission's findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by October 1, 2025.

MDH is committed to strengthening Maryland's public health infrastructure at both the state and local levels and supports SB 281 with the considerations outlined below. MDH is in the initial stages of implementing the recently awarded CDC 5-year award for \$46,924,126: *Strengthening U.S. Public Health Infrastructure, Workforce, and Data Systems*. This grant supports enhancing the state and local public health workforce and delivering foundational capabilities across the breadth of public health areas. One specific example of how funds will be applied is to extend a recently launched, highly successful internship program that attracts students to public health through paid work experience, which is currently funded under a different CDC award: the Crisis Response Cooperative Agreement: COVID-19 Public Health Workforce Supplemental Funding.

MDH respectfully shares the following considerations for the Committee:

1. MDH suggests the Commission membership be updated to ensure inclusion from all relevant organizations focused on the delivery of foundational public health services. This includes adding the Community Health Resources Commission (CHRC). Additionally, while MDH values being included in the Commission, we encourage the Commission to lean on leadership and direction from the academic institutions who will co-chair the Commission and rely on MDH in an advisory capacity for specific requests, focus group discussions, etc.

2. Public health data modernization is a critical component of public health infrastructure. As such, MDH suggests that the State's Department of Information Technology (DoIT) would be an important stakeholder to advise the Commission.
3. In addition, MDH suggests narrowing the scope of the assessment. The current language requires the Commission, when assessing the capability of MDH and LHDs to provide services, to consider the following: (1) the State's response to COVID-19, (2) the State's response to overdose deaths, and (3) the racial and ethnic disparities in maternal mortality and birth outcomes. Understanding each of these is a significant effort in its own right and a narrower scope would allow stronger analyses and recommendations from the Commission.
4. Lastly, MDH suggests narrowing the scope of the areas for which recommendations are made. The current language in the bill states that the Commission shall make recommendations regarding organization, information technology, workforce (including human resources), procurement, funding, and any other appropriate areas. Some of these areas, such as procurement, are governed through State law, regulations, and processes that affect all State agencies. If the intent of the bills is to examine MDH's capacity and capability in these areas (vs. overall state processes), MDH recommends adding clarifying language.

I appreciate the continued strong interest and support of the General Assembly for Maryland's public health infrastructure. We are happy to discuss this and these proposed amendments with the sponsors further. Please do not hesitate to contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs at megan.peters@maryland.gov or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,



Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary