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## SB 281 – Commission on Public Health

### **Position: Favorable with amendments**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments in support of Senate Bill 281. This bill establishes a Commission on Public Health to make recommendations to improve the delivery of foundational public health services in Maryland. CareFirst applauds the intent of this legislation and is committed to driving the transformation of the healthcare experience with and for all our members and communities, with a focus on quality, equity, affordability, and access to care.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the need for all stakeholders responsible for the health of our communities to be able to better respond to urgent public health crises. In 2020, CareFirst started participating in a public-private regional COVID-19 partnership with the State of Maryland, the City of Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, the University of Maryland Medical System, and other local hospital systems, to centralize coordination and regional mobilization of resources to provide higher quality integrated care to Maryland residents. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, CareFirst utilized health indicators and member data to develop an interactive web-based resource that was made available to every hospital and health department in the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated striking differences in health outcomes tied to race, income, and other demographic factors, creating a spotlight on existing inequities that have plagued our communities long before COVID-19. CareFirst is confident the Public Health Commission established by Senate Bill 281 will contribute to strengthening Maryland's public health infrastructure. However, we believe collaboration and continued conversations among all healthcare stakeholders, including the payer voice on the Commission, are necessary in order for us to collectively tackle longstanding health inequities. To that end, **CareFirst appreciates the inclusion of payors on the workgroups under the Commission and respectfully requests that Senate Bill 281 be conformed to House Bill 214, as voted out by the House Health and Government Operations Committee.** As the largest health insurer in the Mid-Atlantic region, we have a deep understanding of the importance of delivering coordinated care to Marylanders and believe insurers can offer an important perspective to the Commission. As an example, we have invested over 10 million in regional funding to address diabetes and upstream social determinant of health factors, and have partnered with SociallyDetermined in a first-of-its-kind expansion of their SocialScape platform and advisory services, giving CareFirst greater ability to identify people with elevated health risks due to social factors.

CareFirst strongly supports the policy goals advanced by Senate Bill 281. We look forward to partnering with legislators, health departments, public health groups, and other stakeholders to advance a transformative healthcare experience, particularly as we deploy targeted strategies through our own organization to ensure the health and well-being of our members, provider partners, employees, and communities.

### **We urge a favorable report with amendments that conform to match House Bill 214.**

#### **About CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield**

*As the largest healthcare insurer in the Mid-Atlantic region, CareFirst provides health insurance products and administrative services to 3.6 million individuals and employers in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. We participate in the individual, small group and large employer markets, as well as in Medicare and Medicaid. CareFirst is Maryland's only nonprofit health service plan and consistent with our not-for-profit mission, we are committed to improving the overall health of the communities we serve, and increasing the accessibility, affordability, safety, and quality of healthcare throughout our service area.*

*To learn more about CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, visit our website at [www.carefirst.com](http://www.carefirst.com) and our transforming healthcare page at [www.carefirst.com/transformation](http://www.carefirst.com/transformation), or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).*