



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 with the amendments below. 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 In addition, state and local agencies were strapped with outdated IT systems that were insufficient to track or efficiently report data ranging from cancer to overdoses to health disparities.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.

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 effort and have several suggestions to increase the productiveness of Commission assessments and recommendations.

Local public health departments operate under diverse circumstances including varying geographic resources, job applicant pools, and different modes of county government. To represent those differences and take advantage of local opportunities, MACHO respectfully makes the following amendments for consideration:

MACHO suggests three local health officers be appointed to the Commission. **We recommend amending Page 3, Line 16 to read:**

(I) Three local health officers - ONE FROM A RURAL JURISDICTION, ONE FROM A SUBURBAN JURISDICTION, AND ONE FROM AN URBAN JURISDICTION

The current composition of the Commission may be too large to facilitate focused, efficient meetings that will allow work to move at an optimal pace. Slower work will delay implementation of valuable recommendations. MACHO recommends removal of the following proposed members as either redundant or *more appropriate for appointment by Commission members to focused workgroups, as needed:*

MACHO recommends the deletion of Page 3, Lines 13-26 and replace with:

(iv) THREE TO FIVE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WITH DEMONSTRATED INTEREST IN PUBLIC HEALTH AND EXPERIENCE IN AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- 1. HEALTH EQUITY;**
- 2. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY;**
- 3. WORKFORCE; AND**
- 4. POPULATION HEALTH.**

Expertise in many facets of public health, including financing, workforce, health equity, and information technology, will require a wider knowledge base than one representative of a particular sector can provide. The standing membership of the Commission will need the ability to appoint experts and advocates to workgroups as needed to fulfill its charge and produce a timely final report.

MACHO *strongly recommends* that the timeline for the Commission’s report to the Governor and Legislature should be accelerated. Moving forward with public health improvements should not wait more than 2 ½ years.

**We recommend that Page 7, Line 7 be amended to:
On or before October 1, 2024, the Commission shall submit...**

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