



HOUSE BILL 214
Commission on Public Health - Establishment
WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
Laurence Polsky, MD, MPH, Calvert County Health Officer
For the Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO)
Position: Support with Amendments – January 26, 2023

The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) is in support of HB 214 with the below listed amendments. 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 In addition, state and local agencies were strapped with outdated IT systems that were insufficient to track or efficiently report data ranging from cancer to overdoses to health disparities.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 HB 214 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 have several suggestions to allow the Commission to function in a more effective manner:

Local public health operates under diverse circumstances including varying geographic resources, job applicant pools, and different modes of county government. As a result, MACHO suggests three local health officers be appointed to the Commission. **We recommend amending Page 3, Line 16 to read:**

- (1) **Three local health officers- One representing a jurisdiction with >500,000 residents, one representing a jurisdiction with 150,000-500,000 residents, and one representing a jurisdiction with <150,000 residents.**

In addition, we suggest **on Page 3, following Line 8, the addition of: The Deputy Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management, or the Deputy Secretary's designee.** Successful enactment of many of the Commission's recommendations will require cooperation from DBM. Having real-time participation from the money people will lead to more realistic recommendations from the Commission and more expedited enactment of recommendations.

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, Line 21 through Page 4, Line 3 and Page 4, Lines 9-10.

These six positions should be encompassed by expertise from other Commission members, e.g., expertise in public health workforce, health equity, and licensed healthcare professionals, or more than one representative of a particular sector will be needed to effectively inform workgroups, e.g., information technology and consumer health advocates.

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 HB 214 with the suggested amendments. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, Executive Director, MACHO, at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433.