



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 8, 2025

Senate Bill 560- Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity – Memberships and Purposes

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) strongly supports Senate Bill 560, Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity – Memberships and Purposes.

This legislation will allow the Maryland Commission on Health Equity to expand its membership to include additional commissioners representing diverse stakeholders and further address health inequities- particularly the impact of transportation access and proximity to health care facilities.

Findings by the Rural Maryland Council and Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland indicate that one in five healthcare appointments are missed due to unreliable or unavailable transportation¹. Among disadvantaged populations, missed appointments are linked to higher prevalence of one or more health conditions versus the general population in Maryland¹. While funding is currently limited in Maryland, investing in transportation programs is crucial. Evidence from other states that show every dollar spent on transportation yields a return of nearly six dollars in healthcare savings¹.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Maryland has 146 health professional shortage areas across primary care, dental care, and mental health services². Per the 2023 Final Report from the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis, these shortages are particularly severe in rural parts of Maryland and are further exacerbated by transportation barriers- restricting patients' access to already scarce healthcare providers³.

As the growth of the healthcare workforce and development of facilities in rural Maryland will take time, SB0560 provides a pathway for Maryland Commission on Health Equity to focus on solutions addressing transportation access and service points.

MRHA is committed to addressing health disparities in rural Maryland and urges for your support on SB0560.

On Behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,

Alexis Garcia, Legislative and Policy Intern

References

1. Rural Maryland Council, Tri-City Council for Southern Maryland. *Report on the TRANSPORTATION HEALTH CARE ROUNDTABLE MEETINGS.*; 2023. <https://rural.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/04/HEALTH-CARE-TRANSPORTATION-ROUNDTABLE-REPORT-3.31.2023.pdf>

2. Shortage areas. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>

3. Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis. 2023. *Final Report 2022/2023.*; 2023. [https://health.maryland.gov/docs/SB%20440%20Ch.%20708%20\(2022\)%20E2%80%93%202023%20Final%20Report%20E2%80%93%20Commission%20to%20Study%20the%20Health.pdf](https://health.maryland.gov/docs/SB%20440%20Ch.%20708%20(2022)%20E2%80%93%202023%20Final%20Report%20E2%80%93%20Commission%20to%20Study%20the%20Health.pdf)