



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 11, 2025

Senate Bill 684 - Public Health – Health Equity Dashboard

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 684, Public Health – Health Equity Dashboard.

This legislation seeks to require the Maryland Department of Health in collaboration with The Commission on Health Equity to develop a graphic data dashboard reporting on topics such as health insurance access, cardiovascular disease, chronic diseases, mental health and substance abuse, cancer, HIV/AIDS, STI (sexually transmitted infection), and other relevant health indicators. This dashboard shall be updated every thirty days to reflect accurate and real-time health data in Maryland that is age-adjusted and separated by race, ethnicity, and gender.

Many rural counties in the U.S. experience pronounced health outcome differences compared to the urban populations, leading them to live nearly two years less on average³. Within Maryland’s rural communities, there are disproportionate levels of cancer, 104.1 deaths per 100,000 versus 73.9 per 100,000 for urban areas, chronic disease, substance use, limited health insurance access, and other extensive disparities².

To this effect, the importance of monitoring and reporting on health inequities to aid improvement efforts for outcomes cannot be overstated. As seen recently, adverse events such as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated health inequities across diverse racial and ethnic groups, further supporting the need for systematic reporting to be able to adequately address¹. While scholarly research provides insight into disparities and inequities, it is not indefinite in its’ reporting or provides the same identification of key factors that day-to-day tracking is able to¹. The availability and transparency of data dashboards can allow a multitude of stakeholders to visualize and use interactive tools to understand complex trends, identify underlying patterns, and forecast future outcomes¹.

For these reasons, MRHA urges for your support in passage of this legislation.

On Behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,

Alexis Garcia, Legislative and Policy Intern

References

1. Gallifant J, Kistler EA, Nakayama LF, et al. Disparity dashboards: an evaluation of the literature and framework for health equity improvement. *The Lancet Digital Health*. 2023;5(11):e831-e839. doi:10.1016/s2589-7500(23)00150-4
2. Rural Data Explorer – Rural Health Information Hub. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/data-explorer?id=192&state=MD>
3. Rural Health: Addressing Barriers to care. NIHCM. <https://nihcm.org/publications/rural-health-addressing-barriers-to-care>