

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1469

Sugary Beverage Distributor Tax (For Our Kids Act)

Before the House Ways and Means Committee

By Vincent DeMarco, President,

Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative

March 6, 2025

Madam Chair, Madam Vice-Chair and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for this opportunity on behalf of the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative to support HB 1469 with an amendment to be submitted by the bill sponsors which would allocate \$15 million per year from the revenue raised by this measure after 2029 to support the Health Equity Resource Communities Program. We thank the sponsors, Delegates Emily Shetty and Joseline Peña-Melnyk, for introducing this very important measure to raise critically need revenue and reduce childhood obesity and diabetes. We also thank the sponsors for agreeing to our proposed amendment.

In April 2024, the Community Health Resource Commission approved twelve HERC grant awards totaling \$41,550,000 to support new and expanded programming in all areas of the [state.in](https://www.state.in.gov) Baltimore City, Prince George's County, Montgomery County, the Lower Eastern Shore, Southern Maryland and Western Maryland. The five-year HERC implementation period commenced on July 1, 2024, and will continue through June 30, 2029. Five of the twelve HERC designations were previously awarded Pathways grantees, enabling them to build upon the impactful work of the 2022-2024 two-year pilot program and expand services. Areas of address include hypertension, diabetes, mental health, behavioral health, maternal and child health, elder care, chronic disease management and sickle cell disease. SDOH support and linkages include housing, food, transportation, workforce development and more.

The five-year HERC program is in its early stages (just over 7 months from the start). Grantees have made great strides as they embark and complete the Year 1 operational tasks and requirements which include (but are not limited to) the hiring of key staffers; executing all MOUs and initiating all key program activities. The CHRC is working with all grantees to assist in the start-up implementation and provide ongoing (both individual and cohort) technical and outreach assistance for grantees and will continue to support the programs as they promote services and drive traffic to their program doors. Traction has already ensued and will continue as programs work thru start-up elements.

Funding for this critically need program ends in 2029. The enactment of HB 1469 with our amendment would fund the HERCs beyond 2029 so they could continue to do their work to reduce health disparities in our state. Although we have not had a chance to run this proposal by our whole coalition, the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative strongly urges this Committee to give HB 1469 a favorable report with our proposed amendment.