

HB 1617: Public Health - Health Innovation Zones - Establishment: Please vote to **OPPOSE** this bill.

Dear Finance Committee:

I am writing to respectfully **oppose HB 1617**, concerning *Public Health – Health Innovation Zones – Establishment*.

Improving access to health care and addressing disparities in health outcomes are important goals. However, **HB 1617 raises concerns because it establishes eligibility criteria for Health Innovation Zones based in part on the demographic composition of the communities involved.** The bill specifies that zones may be designated in areas populated by **communities of color, communities with low-income households, communities with a high immigrant population, or economically disadvantaged communities.**

Public health programs should be designed to serve people based on demonstrated medical needs, health outcomes, and measurable community health indicators. Structuring state programs around demographic or identity-based classifications creates policies that treat communities differently based on characteristics such as race or immigration status rather than focusing on objective health metrics.

Additionally, policies that explicitly categorize communities by demographic characteristics can raise concerns about fairness, equal treatment, and the long-term precedent of using such criteria in the allocation of state programs and resources.

Maryland should continue working to improve health outcomes for all residents by focusing on transparent, needs-based public health strategies that prioritize measurable health indicators and access to care rather than demographic classifications.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **oppose HB 1617.**

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Trudy Tibbals

