

Written Testimony of Keshia M. Pollack Porter, PhD, MPH
Before the Maryland House of Delegates Health and Governments Operations Committee
in **STRONG SUPPORT** of
House Bill 1528: Maryland Council on Health in All Policies – Establishment
March 5, 2020

Good afternoon Chairperson Pendergrass and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is Dr. Keshia Pollack Porter and I am a Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. I am an international expert on Health in All Policies. I have conducted research on ways to advance Health in All Policies, as well as conducted trainings and taught graduate students on the topic. I submit this testimony as a public health professional and concerned resident of Maryland, as well as a member of the Health in All Policies Workgroup -- the group that explored how to advance Health in All Policies in Maryland. I provide this testimony in my own individual capacity. I am not representing the view or position of the Johns Hopkins University or Bloomberg School of Public Health.

House Bill (HB) 1528 establishes the Maryland Council on Health in All Policies, and puts Maryland alongside other states that have prioritized the health of its residents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines Health in All Policies (HiAP) as “a collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking across sectors to improve the health of all communities and people.” HiAP recognizes that health is created by a multitude of factors beyond healthcare and, in many cases, beyond the scope of traditional public health activities. I strongly support the establishment of this Committee in Maryland, and below I state three reasons why we need HiAP in Maryland.

First, the conditions in the places where we live, work and play have a tremendous impact on our health. Unfortunately, health agencies rarely have the authority or organizational capacity to make changes to policies and systems that impact health. Responsibility for these factors that impact health falls to many nontraditional health partners, such as housing, transportation, education, air quality, parks, criminal justice, energy, and employment agencies. HiAP is a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas. HiAP promotes health and health equity through collaboration between public health practitioners and those nontraditional partners who have influence over the social determinants of health. The Council created by HB 1528 will provide a formal way for representatives from state agencies and sectors to come together and advance the health of Maryland residents.

Second, governments, at all levels, are challenged by declining revenues and shrinking budgets while also facing increasingly complex problems. Collaboration across sectors—which is possible through a HiAP approach—can promote efficiency by identifying issues being addressed by multiple agencies and fostering discussion of how agencies can share resources and reduce redundancies. By being more efficient, these cross-government collaborations could decrease costs, as well as improve performance and health outcomes.

Third, HiAP is flexible – there is no one way to advance Health in All Policies. HiAP provides a foundation for those from the health sector to work with those in other government sectors to consider the potential health impacts of policies as they are developed and implemented. This is possible through several strategies such as establishing new data sharing agreements, using tools like health impact assessments to proactively determine how health could be affected during decision-making, or health-based checklists. Regardless of the strategy applied, HiAP responds to the recognition that population health and equity are influenced by a multitude of factors, most of which are outside of the usual scope of the health system.

I strongly support HB 1528. By passing this bill, various Maryland agencies and sectors can work together to explicitly focus on health and equity in all policymaking. HiAP is a strategic and effective approach for addressing complex, multifaceted problems that if implemented will improve policymaking and health.