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**TO:** The Maryland General Assembly  
House Health and Government Operations Committee  
Annapolis, MD

**FROM:** Stephen B. Thomas, PhD  
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School of Public Health and  
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University of Maryland, College Park

**DATE:** March 11, 2020

**RE:** Support HB1528, Maryland Council for Health in All Policies - Establish

Good Afternoon Chairwoman Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the Committee. I am here as professor of Health Policy & Management and Director of the Maryland Center for Health Equity at the School of Public Health, University of Maryland in College Park. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is a sobering wakeup call to action because it demonstrates how a public health crisis impacts all sectors of society. This is the context in which I wish to share with you why it is vitally important to support HB1528 .... proposed legislation to establish the **Maryland Council for Health in All Policies**. The aims of this innovative legislation are to:

1. **Use a Health in All Policies Framework to address and examine health and health equity, as a priority in decision making.**
2. **Act on the principles of the Social Determinants of Health to alleviate the challenges and inequity due to lack of resources.**
3. **Foster collaboration between units of the state and local government to develop policies to improve health across the State.**

A brief background will help put my support into context. You may recall that, in 2017, SB340, sponsored by Senator Shirley Nathan-Pulliam and Delegate Robbyn Lewis, was signed into law by Governor Hogan, establishing **The Health in All Policies Workgroup** (HiAP). The law required the University of Maryland School of Public Health, Center for Health Equity, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health, to convene a workgroup to study and make recommendations to units of state and local government on laws and policies that will positively impact the health of residents of the State.

The workgroup was comprised of designated representatives from agencies, departments, and organizations across the State who, over a three-year period, brought their collective expertise, and knowledge to the table. The HiAP workgroup met monthly to discuss the work-plan, collaborate and create recommendations in accordance with the legislation. Conference calls were held between the monthly meetings to maintain communication and provide assistance to members. At several meetings, members listened to formal presentations from content experts to learn more about the application of the Health in All Policies framework. During that three-year period, the Center for Health Equity, under my direction, and coordination of Mr. Wesley Queen, provided full support, by undertaking complete administrative management for the Health in All Policies Workgroup, including facilitating the activities, providing logistical support, preparing agendas, stimulating discussions, compiling minutes, preparing progress reports and supervising stellar graduate students (Kristanna Peris, Sarah Hurlbert and Lanna Duarte) assigned to assist the workgroup.

On January 31, 2018, The HiAP Workgroup submitted a comprehensive, user friendly, final report to the General Assembly that included research findings and made recommendations for future legislation. The principal recommendation of the HiAP Workgroup is articulated in HB 1528 ... to Establish **The Maryland Council for Health in All Policies**. To that end, the University of Maryland, School of Public Health, Center for Health Equity, looks forward to continuing our role as the state-wide convener, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health.

House Bill 1528 will establish the administrative infrastructure needed to promote health and energize a level of wellness for Maryland residents. It is also a bill that will create opportunities for students (secondary, undergraduate, graduate, post-doctoral fellows) and young faculty from across multiple disciplines to gain first-hand experience on how administrative policies and legislation impact the health and wellbeing of Maryland residents, especially people who live in historically underserved, poorly served and never served neighborhoods and rural communities across the state.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking across sectors to improve the health of all communities and people. Passage of HB1528 will ensure that the Maryland model for HiAP recognizes that health is created by a multitude of factors beyond medical care and, in many cases, beyond the scope of traditional public health activities. In fact, by establishing the **Maryland Council for Health in All Policies**, we will contribute toward the achievement the National Prevention Strategy and Healthy People 2030 goals and enhance the potential for Maryland to both improve health outcomes across the state and serve as a model for the nation. The **Maryland Council for Health in All Policies** may also be effective in identifying gaps in scientific evidence needed to achieve health equity for all.