



Bill No: SB172
Title: Maryland Health Equity Resource Act
Committee: Budget and Taxation
Hearing: January 27, 2021
Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) is a statewide coalition of women's groups and individuals formed to provide a non-partisan, independent voice for Maryland women and families. MLAW's purpose is to advocate for legislation affecting women and families. To accomplish this goal, MLAW creates an annual legislative agenda with issues voted on by MLAW members and endorsed by organizations and individuals from all over Maryland. **SB172 a priority on the 2021 MLAW Agenda and we urge your support.**

SB172 would create Health Equity Resource Communities which would be geographic locations in the state with poor health outcomes that compete for grants, tax incentives, and health care provider loan repayment assistance to increase access to culturally competent care and ultimately reduce health inequities; funding for the Communities, as well as programs to address substance use and mental health disorders, will come from a one penny per dollar increase in the state alcohol beverage sales tax starting in 2021.

Health inequities based on race, ethnicity, disability and place of residence persist throughout the state, as shown in maternal and infant mortality rates and other measures. Inequities are stark at the intersection of gender, race, and location. In Maryland, black mothers die due to pregnancy 4 times more than white mothers, with the disparity continuing to widen over time. The infant mortality rate for Black non-Hispanic infants is 2.5 times the rate for White non-Hispanic infants, with rates worse for rural black infants than urban black infants.

Health Equity Resource Communities would improve health equity, including for women. Communities would compete for grants, tax incentives, and health care provider loan repayment assistance to reduce disparities, including by race and gender, and improve health equity. Funding for the Communities, as well as programs to address substance use and mental health disorders, would come from a one penny per dollar increase in the state alcohol beverage sales tax starting in 2021. Unlike the Health Enterprise Zones pilot which ended after 5 years, money raised by the alcohol tax for the Health Equity Resource Communities would go directly into a dedicated fund for the program to help ensure longevity. This funding would also help create new mental health and substance use disorder programs. In addition to generating much needed funds, the tax itself will save lives and lower health care costs by reducing underage drinking, binge drinking, driving under the influence, and sexually transmitted infections, just like what happened after the last alcohol sales tax increase in 2011. Binge drinking comes with health risks and binge drinking rates are currently rising faster for women than men.

For these reasons, MLAW strongly urges the passage of SB172.

Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women
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