

February 15, 2021

SB563: "Local Health Departments – Funding"

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of the Howard County Board of Health - and, ultimately, the greater than 325,000 residents of Howard County, MD - I am pleased to offer our overwhelming support in favor of SB563.

In the last 20 years, in the near term aftermath of the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil in September, 2001 – when nearly 3000 Americans lost their lives – the U.S. public health infrastructure saw untold growth and renewed focus on providing for increased public health education & training funding streams to develop and exercise public health emergency response plans; fiscal support from the Federal government to be able to perform rapid surveillance, detection, laboratory, response and prevention of disease transmission; all of these activities predicated on the "fear" of another terrorist attack that could take biological or chemical pathways based on threat intelligence that was being evaluated. All of the investments made – however – in the last 20 years have slowly trickled away...

Fast forward 20 years later, as these financial windfalls have been slowly removed, redirected, refocused and otherwise eliminated from local health department (LHD) budgets across this great county, the age-old public health mantra of "*we'll get funding after something happens*" unfortunately came true. The pandemic has exposed the fragile, cobbled together yet tightly woven fabric that local health departments provide to the [nearly 2500 LHDs](#) across the country. This mindset is the epitome of putting a line of ambulances at the bottom of a cliff instead of securing the fence at the top of the cliff.

As is the case in Howard County, LHDs employ critical infrastructure based [public health professionals](#) in a variety of capacities serving our communities. In the wake of the pandemic, public health officials, leadership and in some instances state leadership, [have retired, resigned or quit](#) due to the pressures and – in some instances – personal attacks and threats of violence on these dedicated leaders and their families who are merely trying to PROTECT and preserve the public's health and well-being. The loss of these long-time public health servants can afford those mid-career and opportunity to move on and we need to prepare and embrace these opportunities. These losses will force LHDs to "rebuild from within" as it will take time for the dust to settle and enable us to see what the future will look like.

The potential buoying effect the funds contained within SB563 over the next decade will help to "rebuild the crumbling foundation" of public health infrastructure and sustain us looking forward towards achieving the goals as outlined in [Health People 2030](#). Through helping us to "rebuild the fence at the top of the cliff" LHDs across Maryland can get back to focusing on what we've done and continue to do – protecting, promoting and preserving the public's health and well-being – of our residents, neighbors and families across not only Howard County but all of Maryland.

Very Truly Yours

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