

# CLIMATE X CHANGE

January 25, 2021

**BILL:** SB0172  
**TITLE:** Maryland Health Equity Resource Act  
**POSITION:** SUPPORT  
**HEARING DATE:** 1/27/2021  
**COMMITTEE:** Budget and Taxation  
**SPONSOR:** Senator Antonio Hayes

All Marylanders deserve access to high-quality, affordable health care. 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. In underserved areas of the state, people with chronic conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, asthma, diabetes, and substance and mental health disorders have worse health outcomes and are less able to get the care and treatment they need. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed these health inequities and highlighted the need to address them and otherwise improve health outcomes in our state.

Health Equity Resource Communities would be underserved communities around the state that compete for grants and other financial incentives to address poor health outcomes that contribute to inequities by race, ethnicity, disability, and geographic location. Supporting health and reducing preventable hospital admissions will result in lower overall health care costs, including lower insurance premiums for everyone. This initiative is based on a 2012-2016 pilot that successfully increased access to health resources, improved residents' health, reduced hospital admissions, and created cost savings.

The Communities should be funded by a penny per dollar increase in the alcohol beverage sales tax. The 2011 alcohol beverage sales tax increase led to significant reductions in underage drinking, binge drinking, driving under the influence, and sexually transmitted infections. Maryland has not raised its alcohol beverage sales tax since 2011 and its rate has fallen behind that of Washington D.C. Raising the state's alcohol beverage sales tax will generate necessary funds and reduce drinking, including by underage Marylanders and heavy drinkers, which in turn will save lives and reduce health care costs.

For these reasons and more, Climate XChange urges a FAVORABLE REPORT on SB 172.

Respectfully submitted,  
**Wandra Ashley-Williams**  
**Maryland Regional Director**  
**Climate XChange - Maryland**  
**410-914-8011**