

Testimony on: SB 563

Before: The Committee on Budget and Taxation

Submitted by: Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D.  
Professor of the Practice of Health Policy and Management  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health  
Joshua.Sharfstein@jhu.edu

Position: Support with amendments

Date: February 15, 2021

Disclaimer: *This testimony represents the views of the author, not necessarily the position of Johns Hopkins University.*

Local health departments in Maryland are critically important to the well-being, health, and safety of the state's millions of residents. These agencies are responsible for a wide range of functions, including infectious disease control, food safety, and environmental health. They do everything from signing up Marylanders for health insurance to implementing innovative programs to tackle infant and maternal mortality. Health departments are especially attuned to inequity, along with opportunities to improve the health of communities of color and rural populations.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed around the nation, the failure to invest in local health infrastructure puts us all at risk. Critical tasks include maintaining a robust workforce, modernizing IT systems to share and analyze data effectively, and creating the capacity to mobilize to address public health emergencies.

SB 563 would increase funding for local public health departments, as well as set in motion a process for a long-overdue assessment of IT systems and data capacity across the state. This is important legislation that will support the health of Maryland families for years to come.

One specific suggestion for an amendment: Delete provision (8) on page 5 related to "providing protective equipment for ... health care personnel in contact with patients" as not well suited for this legislation. The general cost of personal protective equipment for healthcare workers in Maryland far exceeds the funding in the bill and is best left for the healthcare system itself. The opportunity to spend a portion of these funds for emergency preparedness is provided for in provision (9).