



**2021 SESSION  
POSITION PAPER**

**BILL:** SB 94 – Public Health – Local Health District Boards

**COMMITTEES:** Budget and Taxation Committee

**POSITION:** Letter of Concern

**BILL ANALYSIS:** SB 94 would establish local health district boards in each local health planning agency for the purpose of identifying health disparities and awarding funds collected through increased taxation on alcoholic beverages and fast food to decrease those disparities.

**POSITION RATIONALE:** The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) continually strives to identify and decrease health disparities. Although SB 94 attempts to achieve these same goals, its unintended consequences will fragment public health efforts, place burdensome demands on local health department oversight capacities, and create duplicative layers of bureaucracy. Each jurisdiction already has an active Local Health Improvement Coalition that collects and monitors health disparity data and fosters local corrective efforts. Each jurisdiction already has an active local health department charged with ensuring the health and safety of their communities and to address health inequities.

An Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities (MHHD) currently exists within the Maryland Department of Health. This Office is charged with orchestrating the goals outlined in SB 94. MHHD allocates and oversees Minority Outreach and Technical Assistance grants to local organizations across Maryland in concert with local health departments (LHDs). MHHD also monitors health equity data, holds cultural competency trainings, and has launched a Community Health Worker Initiative.

SB 94 will set up a duplicative local funding and oversight structure to the existing MHHD. At the local level, this will require significant staffing increases at every LHD. Local health departments are chronically understaffed. Given the monitoring required to oversee the millions of dollars generated by increased taxation of alcoholic beverages and fast food, even the smallest counties in the state would need to hire staff possessing a combination of public health and accounting expertise. Given disparities in state salary levels compared to the private sector, this will be a challenge for the large, central counties and may prove impossible for smaller, rural counties. Even worse, if this bill is amended to eliminate the taxes on alcohol and fast food but the remainder of the bill is enacted into law, LHDs will be mandated to support the costs of Local Health District Boards at the expense of critical safety net programs.

Although we applaud the desire to reduce health disparities, SB 94 chooses a mechanism that adds local bureaucratic burdens without compensatory advancements toward its goals. More adequately funding and staffing LHDs who have the infrastructure in place would be invaluable to their communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this **letter of concern for SB 94**. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at [rmaiora1@jhu.edu](mailto:rmaiora1@jhu.edu) or 410-937-1433. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*