



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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SB 563

DATE: February 17, 2021

SPONSOR: Senator Griffith

ASSIGNED TO: Budget and Taxation

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POSITION: SUPPORT

Local Health Departments - Funding

Senate Bill 563 would make much needed adjustments to the core funding formula for local health departments. Under the bill, by Fiscal Year 2024 the amount of funding for the critical work performed by local health departments will increase by at least \$20 million over current levels. The bill also adds language to include responses related to communicable diseases, such as COVID-19, for which funding can be used.

The need for more public health funding in Maryland cannot be overstated; this has been the case for at least a decade, and the current pandemic has brought into sharp relief the ways local health departments (LHDs) are an essential element of the health care infrastructure in the state. We cannot afford to hamstring the ability of LHDs to prevent and respond to public health issues.

Among many other programs, the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services uses core funding for our disease control program, which is tasked with investigating dozens of communicable diseases and disease outbreaks. The four nurses that we support with core funding for this program are responsible for investigating influenza, legionella, and pneumonia in congregate living facilities, as well as investigating and vaccinating preventable diseases such as measles and pertussis, among many others. Due to the underfunding of the program, the nurses are not able to investigate all reported cases of disease and instead have had to prioritize outbreaks: for example, throughout the ongoing response to COVID-19, investigating cases of Lyme disease had to be put on hold while the program focuses on testing, contact tracing, and vaccinating for COVID-19. With sufficient funding, these nurses could conduct the necessary investigation and follow-up in response to all reported cases of disease, which decreases the need for the additional resources that are necessary if diseases are not properly addressed at the outset. Without funding, human suffering that could be prevented won't be.

Montgomery County, along with every LHD across the state, strongly supports the increase in funding required by Senate Bill 563. We take our responsibility to protect the public's health seriously and work very hard to meet the ever-increasing needs of our communities, during crises and after. We respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 563 to enable us to heed this call.