



COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

January 25, 2021

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chairman
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 172, Maryland Health Equity Resource Act- SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women (“Commission”). We urge a favorable report for SB 172, Maryland Health Equity Resource Act. The Commission is comprised of 15 members from the community who are charged by law to advise the County Executive, County Council and others on issues affecting women.

Legislation to provide equitable access to health resources and resolve health disparities is particularly critical in a year like this one, where communities of color and those characterized by higher rates of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage are disproportionately bearing the health and economic impacts the pandemic has wrought, effects that are compounded by long standing, documented disparities in health care access and health outcomes experienced by people of color, in general, and impoverished demographics, in particular. Ensuring equity in health systems access and outcomes is a civil rights issue, and we owe it to our fellow Marylanders to strive to achieve healthy communities statewide irrespective of race or income.

Analysis of life expectancy in various communities in and around Baltimore revealed that in Baltimore City proper, life expectancy is approximately 20 years less than for residents of more affluent areas in the western part of the region. This analysis also revealed similar disparities in rates of chronic disease and infant mortality.

These disparities have become particularly pronounced during the pandemic, with Covid-19 death rates among Black and Latino populations exceeding that of their white counterparts. According to analysis by Johns Hopkins University, in the state of Maryland, Blacks/African Americans represented 39 percent of total Covid deaths in the state, despite composing only 30 percent of the total population, and Hispanics/Latinos represented another 11 percent of total deaths, and 10 percent of the total state population.

Among women, the Commission's primary focus, data related to maternal and infant mortality and certain types of cancer-related mortality show particularly marked disparities between white women and women of color. For example, in Maryland, Black mothers are four times as likely to die as a result of pregnancy than white mothers, and the infant mortality rate for Black, non-Hispanic infants is two and a half times the rate for White, non-Hispanic infants. According to analysis conducted in 2018 by our Commission as part of its decennial *Status of Women* report, in Montgomery County, African American mothers are 65 percent more likely to experience infant mortality than the maternal population at large.

In the midst of ongoing pandemic conditions, the need for more equitable care access and better outcome prospects have never been more urgent. Targeted policy interventions like this bill are a critical first step to sever the link between demography and destiny and ensure healthy communities are the birthright of every Marylander.

Sincerely,



Nicole Y. Drew, Esq.
President
Montgomery County Commission for Women

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