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SB 52 – Public Health – Maryland Commission on Health Equity (The Shirley Nathan-Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021)

Position: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments in support of Senate Bill 52. This bill creates the Maryland Commission on Health Equity to examine the health of Maryland residents through the lens of a health equity framework, including how social determinants of health impact the health of Maryland residents. Based on a comprehensive review of these factors and the study of comprehensive health data sets facilitated by the State Health Information Exchange, the Commission will make recommendations on viable policy avenues to improve health outcomes for Marylanders.

CareFirst is focused on driving the transformation of the health care experience with and for our members and communities. Structural racism is undeniably among the most sinister and ongoing drivers of our public health crisis which is exacerbated in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic. It serves as the foundation of social determinants of health, which are factors that influence health in places where people live, learn, work, and play—such as food and income. It is also at the root of deep disparities in social, economic, and health outcomes particularly.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the significant shortcomings and gaps between healthcare delivery, public health, and community health. Senate Bill 52 provides a much needed forum for policymakers and other stakeholders to work together to identify the root causes of health disparities—such work will provide informed guidance on how the state can best contribute to implementing sustainable solutions. These include addressing social determinants of health, such as improving access to care, promoting healthy foods, stable housing and providing economic support.

CareFirst looks forward to working with legislators, public health groups and other partners to help advance the work of the Commission, as we continue to employ targeted health equity strategies within our own organization to advance the health of our members.

We urge a favorable report.

About CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield

In its 83rd year of service, CareFirst, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a not-for-profit healthcare company which, through its affiliates and subsidiaries, offers a comprehensive portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to 3.4 million individuals and employers in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. In 2019, CareFirst invested \$43 million to improve overall health, and increase the accessibility, affordability, safety and quality of healthcare throughout its market areas. To learn more about CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, visit our website at www.carefirst.com and our transforming healthcare page at www.carefirst.com/transformation, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).