



House Bill 836

COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing, and Vaccination Act of 2021

RE: **LETTER OF INFO**

To: Health and Government Operations and
Appropriations Committees

Date: February 23, 2021

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) has not taken a position on HB 836 and its many provisions. We wish to express to the Committees a general view from counties on the ongoing reaction to the COVID-19 crisis in Maryland, as we all work daily to serve and protect our county residents.

VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

Each county, led by its Local Health Department, has sought to prioritize vulnerable residents, and offer an orderly system for vaccinations. The supply from the federal government has made doing so a persistent challenge, with too many rule-following residents complying with a registration process, only to find their appointment canceled. All can agree this is a negative outcome.

A recent commitment to a multi-week allocation will surely help reduce the cancelations and frustrations that accompany eleventh-hour allocation reductions, but weather challenges this month will compound what has already been a difficult and frustrating process for far too many Marylanders.

County officials, working in tandem with local Health Officers, represent the most effective and equitable agents in each community to help deliver vaccines.

We remain in communications with the Administration and Maryland Department of Health to collaborate on, and improve, any facet of this critical system where we can. We all share the goals of reaching and helping Marylanders effectively and rapidly.

TESTING AND TRACING

Testing and tracing, as well, has a role to play in this effort – although its proper priority is not a matter of unanimity. Regardless, resources to promote the best information about the spread of the virus and its multiple variants are essential tools in battling this pandemic locally.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

In the weeks ahead, we expect the effort to work through the phases of vaccinating the Maryland population will present additional challenges. Among them will be a population uncertain or uncomfortable about receiving the vaccine. The communication and information campaigns required to overcome a potential widespread reluctance will require cooperation from public and private actors, and will be essential to protect our friends and neighbors.

LEGISLATION AND RESOURCES

Counties recognize the good intentions of legislation designed to refine the State's approach and response to this pandemic. The deployment of State and federal resources, funding and otherwise, to the effort is important.

Counties, led by our health professionals, stand ready to collaborate with the Administration and the General Assembly in further developing the best framework for vaccinating Marylanders, even as we engage day-to-day in the actual delivery and administration of life-saving treatments.