



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 2, 2021

House Bill 463 Maryland Health Equity Resource Act

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Barron, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 463 Maryland Health Equity Resource Act.

MRHA supports this legislation that establishes Health Equity Resource Communities (HERC) to reduce health disparities, improve health outcomes, improve access to primary care, promote primary and secondary prevention services, and reduce health care costs and hospital admissions and readmissions. In the establishment of HERC, MRHA also recommends that there be adequate rural representation on the Advisory Committee. In addition to MRHA and its rural members, the Maryland Community Health Resources Committee is well established across the rural health community and would also be a useful Advisory Committee member. MRHA believes this representation on the governing body is a key action in maintaining and expanding quality and equitable health care for rural Marylanders and underserved populations.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

Maryland law states that "many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitation, and economic development infrastructure." (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b)

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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