



Committee: Health and Government Operations

Testimony on: HB0463 – Maryland Health Equity Resource Act

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 2, 2021

Bill Contact: Delegate Barron

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 2500 members who live in a wide range of communities in Montgomery and Frederick Counties, from Bethesda to Frederick and from Poolesville to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation that keeps its members healthy, uplifts residents in all of its diverse communities, and promotes equity across all of Maryland. DTMG supports HB0463 because addressing health inequities is a priority for our organization and members.

HB0463 addresses the large health inequities in our state, which have been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2018 study by the Virginia Commonwealth University found that life expectancy varies by up to 16 years across census tracts in Montgomery County alone. Across our state, people of color and immigrants are disproportionately experiencing poor health outcomes due to a lack of adequate resources. I work at a non-profit in Prince George's County, in a zip code that has been one of the hardest hit by COVID in the state. There is very poor access to providers, particularly for the undocumented population, and the schools are reporting a mental health crisis among both students and their families. Many have lost several family members, due in part to the unequal burden of chronic conditions, and the food insecurity rate is further exacerbating these preexisting disparities.

HB0463 aims to decrease health inequities through the creation and funding of Health Equity Resource Communities. The Health Equity Resource Communities are modeled on Health Enterprise Zones (HEZ), which have been found to lead to substantial cost savings, decreased hospitalizations, and improved outcomes for patients with chronic conditions. DTMG strongly believes in following the science, and the pilot HEZ program has demonstrated that Health Equity Resource Communities will be a cost-effective and successful means of improving the health of our most vulnerable communities. A program like the Health Equity Resource Community could be life-changing for residents in the community I serve, by improving access to primary and mental health care and supporting better management of chronic conditions.

HB0463 will be funded through a small increase in the tax on alcohol. While DTMG believes that equity in public health should be supported through direct budget appropriations rather than through regressive taxes, studies have shown that taxing consumer products can have a positive effect on people's behavior. Previous tax increases on alcohol were shown to decrease binge drinking, particularly among young people, and also decreased driving under the influence. For this reason, DTMG supports the funding mechanism of HB0463.

Health Equity Resource Committees are an evidence-based tool for decreasing the large health inequities across our state. During the COVID-19 pandemic and afterwards, it is more crucial than ever for Maryland to prioritize health equity.

Therefore, DoTheMostGood recommends a **FAVORABLE** report on HB0463.

Respectfully submitted,
Bronte Nevins
Co-lead, DoTheMostGood Communications Team
bnevins1@alumni.jh.edu