



Wicomico County Health Department

108 East Main Street • Salisbury, Maryland 21801

Lori Brewster, MS, APRN/BC, LCADC • Health Officer



HOUSE BILL 267

Criminal Law – Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member

LETTER TO CHAIR CLIPPINGER AND JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

For the Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO)

Lori Brewster, MS, APRN/BC, LCADC, Health Officer, Wicomico County

Position: – Support – January 25, 2022

Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Lori Brewster, Health Officer for the Wicomico County Health Department. On behalf of the Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO), the professional association of the chief executives of the state's 24 local health departments, I am writing **in support of House Bill 267**.

Since March 2020, health officials across the country, including local health officers here at home, rushed to implement life-saving prevention and mitigation measures in response to the unprecedented emergence and spread of SARS-CoV2, better known as COVID-19. As new information on COVID-19 emerged constantly, we learned on-the-go while simultaneously fighting the virus on all fronts. Initially, communities rallied behind us in the efforts to stem COVID-19, but as the pandemic persisted many understandably grew weary of the measures used and some began to act out their frustrations upon the local health officers and health department staff.

While carrying out COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures, my staff and I have been:

- Harassed via phone calls, social media messages, emails, and in-person.
- Intimidated while enforcing COVID-19 measures
- Threatened with bodily harm and verbally abused while enforcing COVID-19 orders

When discussing my experiences with my colleagues, this harassment and intimidation of health officials is a common occurrence during this pandemic. As a health officer, it is my duty to recommend and follow science-based measures to help my community prevent disease/illness and remain healthy. In doing my job, there have been times where I have feared for my own safety as well as my staff's.

In conclusion, the ongoing threats and intimidation of public health officials in our professional capacity have deep effects on the health and safety of our community as well as us personally. In light of these menacing acts, we need protection and support to fulfil our duty to the public and make it safe for our staff to continue the arduous fight against COVID-19. I urge you to support this legislation.

Thank you for your time and invitation to address the committee.

For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, Executive Director, MACHO, at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433.