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HB0619

March 12, 2024

**TO:** Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee  
**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations  
**RE:** House Bill 619 – Public Health - Commission on Universal Health Care  
**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 619.

HB 619 establishes the Commission on Universal Health Care to study the feasibility of establishing universal health care for all Maryland residents through a single-payer system. This is an important first step toward ensuring that all Maryland residents have access to health care. Maryland is already at the forefront of innovative health care financing and access, with our global hospital budgets and rate-setting for hospital services. Despite this, almost 6.5 percent of Baltimore City residents remain uninsured.<sup>i</sup> Lack of health insurance is a leading barrier to health care access, resulting in uninsured persons being less likely to receive important preventive health care services, such as blood pressure checks, blood sugar testing, mammograms, and colon cancer screening.<sup>ii</sup> Early and consistent access to preventative health care reduces the risk for disease, disability, and death. It also saves costs, as timely, consistent preventive care helps prevent the need for more costly interventions later on.<sup>iii,iv</sup> Additionally, the single-payer approach would allow for healthcare savings state-wide through lower administrative costs, simplified billing, and lower drug costs.<sup>v</sup>

Increasing the proportion of US adults who receive preventive health care is a primary goal of the US Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2030 Framework – a set of data-driven national objectives to improve health and wellbeing.<sup>iii</sup> Establishing the Commission proposed in this bill could be the first step in Maryland leading the way to meeting this national goal. Some states, such as Washington and Oregon, have legislatively established commissions and task forces charged with developing state plans for universal health care systems.<sup>vi,vii</sup> Passing HB 619 would bring Maryland into the ranks of these trailblazing states.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 619.

<sup>i</sup> US Census Bureau. (2023). QuickFacts – Baltimore City, Maryland. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/baltimorecitymaryland/PST045223>

<sup>ii</sup> Garfield, R. Orgera, K., & Damico, A. (2019). The Uninsured and the ACA: A Primer - Key Facts about Health Insurance and the Uninsured amidst Changes to the Affordable Care Act. KFF. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/report-section/the-uninsured-and-the-aca-a-primer-key-facts-about-health-insurance-and-the-uninsured-amidst-changes-to-the-affordable-care-act-how-does-lack-of-insurance-affect-access-to-care/>

<sup>iii</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). Health People 2030 – Preventive Care. Retrieved from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/preventive-care>

<sup>iv</sup> Levine, S., Malone, E., Lekachvili A., & Briss P. (2019). Health Care Industry Insights: Why the Use of Preventive Services Is Still Low. *Prev Chronic Dis*, 16(180625). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.180625>

<sup>v</sup> Cai, C., Runte, J., Ostrer, I., Berry, K., Ponce, N., Rodrigues, M., Bertozzi, S., White, J., & Kahn, J. (2020). Projected costs of single-payer healthcare financing in the United States: A systematic review of economic analyses. *PLOS Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003013>

<sup>vi</sup> Washington Health Care Authority. (2024). Universal Health Care Commission. Retrieved from <https://www.hca.wa.gov/about-hca/who-we-are/universal-health-care-commission>

<sup>vii</sup> Oregon Health Authority. (n.d.). Task Force on Universal Health Care. Retrieved from <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/hpa/hp/pages/task-force-universal-health-care.aspx>