



House Bill 874

County Health Officers - Authority of County Governing Body and Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance Committee

Date: April 1, 2014

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties **SUPPORTS** House Bill 874. This bill alters the process by which a county health officer is hired, and provides that various elements of a health officer dismissal decision remain confidential.

Under current law, a county health officer is nominated by the county and appointed by the Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene. The governing body for each county determines the process for the nomination. The Secretary may reject the nomination if the nominee does not meet the necessary qualifications, such as the necessary degree, experience or training, as required under the statute. Once appointed, the health officer serves at the pleasure of the governing body of the county and the Secretary, and may only be removed from office at the concurrence of the governing body and the Secretary.

MACo raised concerns at the bill's initial hearing regarding problematic changes to the current hiring and removal process. However, as amended by the House and through an agreement between MACo and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), the bill now requires the local governing body to consult with DHMH when determining a process to fill a vacancy in the position of a health officer. It no longer requires a one-size-fits-all process, which was prominent among MACo's original concerns. It also retains the current process for dismissal, where the health officer serves at the concurrent pleasure of the county governing body and the Secretary of DHMH. Meetings concerning the dismissal of a health officer are required to be closed and information relating to dismissal must be confidential, which is generally consistent with most local government policies for such executive functions.

The House amendments to HB 874 address the concerns counties had raised during this bill's House hearing. MACo is grateful for the work of the sponsor and the Department and therefore urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 874.