



House Bill 1043

Local Health Departments – Funding and Infrastructure

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
with AMENDMENTS

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: March 16, 2021

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 1043 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill addresses support for our state's front lines of public health and prevention efforts – the local health departments. The bill also clarifies pandemic-related uses of these funds, and requires a study of the information systems supporting these public health services.

MACo urges the Committee to conform HB 1043 to HB 1123, a similar bill pending before the Committee, and to advance this top MACo legislative priority.

The pandemic of 2020-21 has tested our public health infrastructure like nothing before – requiring medical and support staff to depend on resources from all available sources to respond. Maryland's leaders on the front lines have acted admirably in the face of this great challenge – but the support for them leading up to this crisis has not mirrored this important policy priority. HB 1043 proposes to steel our resolve to support this essential function, and be ready for whatever next challenge arises in public health.

First, this bill advances the core funds for local health departments modestly in each of the next two years. Local health departments receive targeted grant funds for many specific programs, but it is this core funding that “keeps the lights on” and supports central staff, equipment, technology, and the like. Even the HB 1123 funding levels are far from a full restoration of reductions made in years before the pandemic, but still represent an admirable and appropriate step forward given the heightened understanding of public health. **Amending in funding provisions from HB 1123 is an essential step forward.**

Second, the bill requests a study by the end of 2021 of the information systems that support these needed functions, at both the State and local level. Data sharing and management is an important part of modern public health – and Health Officers are concerned that their support systems are lacking. The study should offer guidance on next steps for the Maryland Department of Health, to bring this important backdrop technology up to modern standards. **HB 1123 offers more guidance on the nature of the study, and that language is a preferable approach.**

The bill heard earlier this session, HB 1123, adds to the areas where these core funds may be used. The new additions all relate to the realities of the pandemic – personal protective equipment, materials needed to combat communicable diseases, and information sharing. None of these functions are outside the general scope of a local health department, the language just eliminates any ambiguity about the intended use of State funds. **Amending comparable provisions into HB 1043 would strengthen its effectiveness, and grant welcome assurances to local health professionals who engage these efforts every day.**

This bill provides local health departments with the funding and flexibility they need. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS HB 1043, WITH AMENDMENTS to strengthen its provisions to match those in HB 1123**, to demonstrate a next phase of support for the public health infrastructure that our communities all rely upon.