



## Senate Bill 158

### *Maryland Department of Health - Community Dental Clinics Grant Program*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance and Budget & Taxation Committees

Date: February 6, 2019

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 158 as it creates a grant program to help counties establish affordable community dental clinics.

Counties have a duty to protect and promote the health and well-being of their communities. To advance those goals, they offer a range of public health services through their local health departments or community organization partnerships. Accordingly, they have an interest in ensuring their residents have access to affordable dental care, which can be very difficult for uninsured and underinsured residents to receive. County public health efforts seek to address the several health conditions that have been linked to poor oral health—including heart disease, premature and low birth weights, and diabetes.

SB 158 supports county efforts to provide access to oral health care and stem associated diseases by creating a grant program where counties can be awarded funds to establish free or low cost dental clinics in their communities. It is modeled after several existing successful capital grant programs such as the Community Mental Health, Addiction and Developmental Disabilities Facilities Capital Program. The funds can be used for a range of purposes to target local needs such as converting a public building into a clinic; acquiring an existing building to be used for a clinic; renovating an existing clinic; or planning, designing, and constructing a clinic. This range of options will help counties target their unique local needs.

The grant program also leverages federal and local resources and provides extra support in high poverty areas. State funds may cover up to 50% of eligible costs after all federal grants are applied and up to 75% of eligible costs for projects in areas of high poverty. Counties are able to use community development block funds as local matching funds.

The grant program established in SB 158 helps counties meet their communities' public health needs for affordable dental clinics. Accordingly, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 158.