



## Senate Bill 563

### *Local Health Departments - Funding*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

Date: February 17, 2021

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 563. This bill strengthens 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. **This bill is a central initiative of the Maryland Association of Counties.**

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. SB 563 proposes three elements to steel our resolve to support this essential function, and be ready for whatever next challenge arises in public health.

First, SB 563 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. The funding levels proposed in the bill 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.

Second, SB 563 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.

Finally, 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.

This bill provides local health departments with the funding and flexibility they need. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** SB 563 to demonstrate a next phase of support for the public health infrastructure that our communities all rely upon.