



Senate Bill 858

Health Insurance – Access to Local Health Departments

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Health & Government Operations Committee

Date: March 29, 2018

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 858 as it expands insurance coverage and patients' access to care from local health departments (LHD).

LHDs are the state's frontline for public health services and education in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions. These departments not only administer and enforce state and local health laws and regulations, but many also provide a range of direct services including preventative care, immunizations, mental health and substance use counseling, and communicable disease prevention.

SB 858 would require insurance carriers to offer insurance contracts to LHDs for the delivery of covered treatment services including behavioral health care services. LHDs could elect to be added to the carriers' networks expanding the range of patients that are able to access treatment services from the departments. Currently, only some insurance carriers either contract or have agreements with LHDs and only for a limited selection of services.

Expanding insurance coverage to LHDs would significantly improve the ability for patients around the state to receive cost-effective and quality treatment within their communities. This is especially important for behavioral health care access. In Maryland, 19 jurisdictions are federally designated mental health provider shortage areas, and a number of those are also deficient in substance use providers. In many rural areas of the state, LHDs are the sole providers of behavioral health services. This bill saves patients from traveling significant distances to receive services from other providers at greater costs.

SB 858 supports LHDs' efforts to deliver vital public health services and increases patients' access to that care. For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 858.