



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 24, 2022

To: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair, House Ways & Means Committee

Re: Letter of Information - House Bill 665 – Public Schools – Air Quality Testing – Posting Online

Dear Chair Atterbeary:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 665.

In 2021, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation approved Maryland's State Integrated Health Improvement Strategy (SIHIS), which is "a fundamental component of the [Maryland Total Cost of Care Model](#)."¹ SIHIS contains three domains to improve the health care system and health outcomes for Marylanders. Total population health, the third domain, includes three goals focused on diabetes, opioid use disorder, and maternal and child health. Decreasing asthma-related emergency department visit rates for children 2-17 years old is the child health goal.² Race/ethnic-specific targets are included to reduce the disparity in emergency department visit rates between Black and white youth. Community interventions, like better air quality and other environmental improvements, are needed to achieve these goals.

HB 665 promotes air quality testing in public schools and requires results to be easily accessible to the public. Air quality is an important determinant of health. Even a low concentration of particulate matter can lead to adverse health outcomes. Chronic exposure to indoor air pollutants increases the risk of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other illnesses.³ Young children are especially vulnerable, which means air quality within the public school system is important.

Communities of color are disproportionately exposed to air pollution across income levels.⁴ This unequal exposure leads to disparities in chronic conditions like asthma. Black children nationwide have disproportionately high rates of asthma; more than 14% of Black children have asthma compared to 8% of white children.⁵ This national disparity is also true in Maryland. On the Eastern Shore, for example, Black children have five times the rate of asthma-related emergency department visits as white children.⁶ High rates of asthma increase health care costs.

¹ Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation. (March 17, 2021). "[Statewide Integrated Health Improvement Strategy Proposal](#),".

² Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission. (December, 2020). [Statewide Integrated Health Improvement Strategy Proposal](#).

³ US Environmental Protection Agency. (November 2, 2017). [Indoor Air Quality](#).

⁴ Tessum CW, Paoletta DA, Chambliss SE, Apte JS, Hill JD, Marshall JD. PM2.5 pollutants disproportionately and systemically affect people of color in the United States. *Sci Adv*. 2021;7(18):eabf4491. doi:[10.1126/sciadv.abf4491](#)

⁵ National Public Radio. (December 28, 2015). [Childhood Asthma Rates Level Off, But Racial Disparities Remain](#).

⁶ Maryland Department of Health. (n.d.). Statewide Integrated Health Improvement Strategy: Maternal and Child Health- Why Focus on Asthma?

For example, in 2018 asthma led to more than \$73 million in hospital charges for Maryland children.⁷

Meeting SIHIS goals will require innovative partnerships at the community level to address and support the health of all Marylanders.

For more information, please contact:
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⁷ Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission. (December, 2020). Statewide Integrated Health Improvement Strategy Proposal.