



## House Bill 308 – Public Service Commission – Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity –Rapid Health Impact Assessment Requirement

February 14, 2019 1:00pm  
Committee: Economic Matters  
Position: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Environmental Health Network supports bills that are consistent with scientific research in the fields of public and environmental health, and those which advance social justice and equity. Marylanders are more likely to achieve health and longevity when we live in environments of clean air and water, strong local economies, and meaningful community engagement in policy-making. As a statewide network, we draw on a diverse constituency of health advocates, educators, researchers, health care professionals, and community leaders to evaluate legislative proposals.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 308, because we believe it will improve the health and well-being of communities across Maryland. These assessments make use of readily available quantitative, qualitative, and participatory techniques to fully assess the impact these policies, plans, and projects will have on a community.<sup>1</sup>

Rapid Health Impact Assessments are quickly becoming a standard tool to evaluate the human impact of long term infrastructure investment. In fact, a February 2015 report from the Health Impact Project, which considered data from the National Conference of State Legislatures, from 2009 to 2014, found that 17 states had considered a total of 56 bills to mandate that health impacts be taken into account prior to making final decisions on proposed projects and policies.<sup>2</sup> While many of these bills did not explicitly seek the use of an Health Impact Assessment (HIA) tool, 8 states considered bills that included most of the elements of a traditional HIA.<sup>3</sup>

Health Impact Assessments are generally supported by the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who have included the process as a part of their planning resources for their *Healthy People 2020* initiative.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the Environmental Protection Agency, cites these assessments as essential tools to maximize potential positive health impacts while minimizing potential negative health impacts.<sup>5</sup>

Notably, in 2017 our own legislature took up the question of improved human health outcomes in state planning and projects by way of its SB340/HB1225 legislation and required a workgroup of State and non-state agency representatives to examine the health of Maryland residents and to determine ways for “State and local government to collaborate to implement policies that will positively impact the health of residents of the state”<sup>6</sup> The findings of the subsequent workgroup, of which the Network was a member, lay out a framework, which is being tested now, for how human health conscious planning could be implemented with the collaboration of public, private and government sectors.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. Health Impact Assessment. <http://www.who.int/hia/about/why/en/>. Accessed March 6, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Health Impact Legislation on the States, [https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2015/01/hia\\_and\\_legislation\\_issue\\_brief.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2015/01/hia_and_legislation_issue_brief.pdf) Accessed February 1, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Impact Assessment. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypplaces/hia.htm> September 19, 2016. Accessed March 6, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. Health Impact Assessments. <https://www.epa.gov/healthresearch/health-impact-assessments>. July 19, 2017. Accessed March 6, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> 2017, Maryland General Assembly (SB340 p. 2 (b)), Report required by State Government Article 5-112 (MSAR #5566)

<sup>7</sup> See supplemental materials for The University of Maryland School of Public Health, Center for Health Equity Workgroup on Health in All Policies (SB340) report.



It is important to note that Health Impact Assessments provide essential information to decision-makers, because they deliver more complete information on the potential impact of a proposal on the entire population, particularly communities identified as vulnerable. And while these assessments benefit communities, they can also ensure sustainability of projects overall by evaluating both the short and long-term impacts of a project. At its core, HIAs are founded on the “values of democracy, equity, sustainable development, and the ethical use of evidence”.<sup>8</sup> HIAs allow all stakeholder parties to participate in appraising the impact of an action. This collaborative effort can result in more positive and less combative outcomes for all involved.

Studies show that HIAs boost the participation of community members while helping to support the development of responsive policies<sup>9</sup>. For these outcomes to be realized, it is essential that HIAs be included as part of the planning process as soon as is possible. Not only can decision-makers benefit from inclusive information gathering but the process supports the promotion of public health as a practice and improves the quality of life for residents who are not caught unawares by development projects where they live.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, this bill was conceived of by Maryland residents who are concerned about harm to the air, water, soil and how that could translate to the overall health of their communities. During the process they sought out the advice of the Bill sponsor and Public Service Commission, and the Office of People’s Counsel to determine the most sensible way to navigate this process. As a Network, we intentionally seek out collaborations that create pathways for all involved while supporting community health and resiliency.

We believe that this bill reasonably addresses the human health concerns of those who will be affected most by the projects that the Public Service Commission presides over as a part of its mission to create standards to encourage the public trust and enforce the public interest. Similarly, we are certain that the use of a rapid HIA would enhance the processes of the PSC and should be welcomed as a measure of parity that relates to improved health, well-being, and safety for all Marylanders. As such we urge a favorable report on HB 308.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tamara Toles O'Laughlin". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin  
Executive Director  
Maryland Environmental Health Network

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<sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Impact Assessment. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/hia.htm> September 19, 2016. Accessed March 6, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Broeder LD, Uiters E, Have W, Wagemakers A, Schuit AJ. Community Participation in Health Impact Assessment: A scoping review of the literature. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*. 2017; 66: 33-42.

<sup>10</sup> Harris-Roxas B, O’Mullane M. Health Impact Assessment for Health Promotion, Education and Learning. *Global Health Promotion*. 2016; 24(2): 3-4.