



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Acting Secretary

**The Maryland Department of Health's
Responses to the DLS FY 2022 Budget Analysis
February 8, 2021**

**Maryland Department of Health
Public Health Administration**

Policy Questions

Without information on non-State LHD expenditures and other State LHD grants outside of the core formula, it is difficult to assess how State funding for LHDs compares to actual local public health costs over time. MDH should discuss broadly: how Core Public Health Services funding is currently used by LHDs; where LHDs have unmet need; how the department plans to allocate the \$4 million in general funds budgeted for LHDs under the Office of the Secretary and what the allowable uses of that funding will be; how the funding formula allocations compare to actual LHD expenditures and local matching funds in fiscal 2019; and any recommendations the department has to change the formula (pgs. 8-9).

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has prioritized all of its internal resources for COVID-19 response efforts. Unfortunately, we are unable to conduct the fiscal analysis required as all of our analysts are focused on (1) COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts; (2) COVID-19 patient surge and hospital capacity management; (3) ensuring the availability of COVID-19 testing to Marylanders; (4) maintaining a robust contact tracing effort; and (5) ensuring the availability of personal protective equipment for healthcare facilities located in the state. We look forward to resuming normal departmental activities as we move forward with our vaccination efforts.

In addition, MDH regrets that we are unable to expand upon the discussion prompts recommended by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) regarding local health departments (LHDs) due to our ongoing COVID-19 response efforts. We look forward to resuming normal departmental activities as we move forward with our vaccination efforts.

The department should discuss why its PHA vacancy rate remains at 9.1% and how it is recruiting and retaining public health professionals during the pandemic. The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends committee narrative requesting that MDH submit a report on State and local public health vacancy rates and efforts to recruit and retain staff (pg. 10).

As the analysis notes, the vacancy rate for the Deputy Secretary of Public Health Services budget has improved from 12.2% at the start of the fiscal year to 9.1% as of 12/31/2020. That 9.1% vacancy rate translates into nine vacant full-time positions. The program would need to fill three vacant positions to align the vacancy rate with the budgeted turnover rate of 6.5%. DBM has approved position unfreeze requests to fill five vacancies in the Office of Provider Engagement and Regulation (OPER) and two vacancies in the Vital Statistics Administration. One of the vacant OPER positions was filled on 1/27/2021, dropping the vacancy rate to 8.1%. The Department expects that this program's vacancy rate will continue to fall as more recruitments close and positions are filled.

While this particular program is showing progress in lowering its vacancy rate, the Department would like to take this opportunity to share that higher-than-normal vacancy rates for many MDH programs are staying flat or rising. The pandemic has required a significant number of employees, including managers at all levels, to staff the state's COVID response effort. Other staff members are taking on more responsibilities to accommodate the workload of their redeployed colleagues. Redeployed individuals and those covering for them have decreased capacity to initiate and stay on top of recruitment efforts. The Department therefore has focused recruitment efforts on positions that are vital to either the statewide COVID response or to maintaining base operations for the Department's programs.

Finally, MDH respectfully requests that the due date for the requested report be extended to at least January 15, 2022, due to ongoing COVID-19 response efforts.

The department should provide updates on the recruitment process for the chief ME and deputy chief ME positions and the continuing efforts to recruit and retain MEs and forensic investigators (pg. 13).

The Department's candidate of interest for the Chief Medical Examiner position has accepted his offer and has a scheduled start date of 2/10/2021. The Chief Medical Examiner's candidate was recommended following a selection process conducted through the Port-Mortem Examiners' Commission.

One of the two Deputy Chief Medical Examiner positions is vacant, as noted in the analysis, and the person occupying the second Deputy position is currently working as the acting Chief Medical Examiner. Deputy Medical Examiner duties and responsibilities have been handled by Medical Examiners during this period of recruitment for the Chief Medical Examiner. It is expected that the new Chief Medical Examiner will work with MDH leadership to review OCME's organizational structure, including the two Deputy positions, and confirm that organizational structure's alignment with the needs of the office before acting to fill the vacant Deputy position.

As mentioned in the analysis, a 12% pay increase for Medical Examiner positions went into effect on 12/1/2020 as part of the Annual Salary Review process. This pay bump is expected to bolster retention of existing employees and boost recruitment efforts. The salary adjustment is still very recent, but already MDH's Office of Human Resources (OHR) reports an increase in interest for Medical Examiner job postings.

In addition, the Department has created and filled a contractual position whose duties focus solely on proactive recruitment of candidates for vacant Medical Examiner positions. The person occupying this position formerly worked as a professional headhunter, and OHR expects that her expertise will help push past barriers to recruitment, especially decreased opportunities to promote these State employment opportunities due to the canceling of job fairs, conferences, and other gatherings of Medical Examiner professionals due to the COVID pandemic.

Overdue JCR Responses

The Maryland Department of Health has prioritized all of its internal resources for COVID-19 response efforts. Unfortunately, we are unable to conduct the fiscal analysis required as all of our analysts are focused on (1) COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts; (2) COVID-19 patient surge and hospital capacity management; (3) ensuring the availability of COVID-19 testing to Marylanders; (4) maintaining a robust contact tracing effort; and (5) ensuring the availability of personal protective equipment for healthcare facilities located in the state.

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The OCME Accreditation and Staffing JCR is being finalized and reviewed for accuracy prior to submission.

For any questions, please contact Webster Ye, Assistant Secretary, Health Policy at Webster.Ye@Maryland.gov /410-260-3190 or Heather Shek, Deputy Director of Governmental Affairs at Heather.Shek@Maryland.gov and at the same phone number.