

MedChi

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TO: The Honorable Thomas M. Middleton, Chairman
Members, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Catherine Pugh

FROM: Joseph A. Schwartz, III
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J. Steven Wise

DATE: March 10, 2010

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 851 – *Maryland Health Improvement and Disease Prevention Act*

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), which represents over 7,300 Maryland physicians and their patients, supports Senate Bill 851.

Senate Bill 851 establishes a Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Improvement and Disease Prevention comprised of two members of the Senate, two members of the House and one member appointed by the Governor. The Commission is to be staffed by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), and is to consider incentives to help State residents improve their health and mitigate the risk of debilitating disease. The commission will make its recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by January 1, 2011.

The bill charges the Commission with evaluating whether the State should adopt various tax incentives for a range of activities that promote healthy lifestyles, disease prevention and health promotion. These programs and activities include but are not limited to smoking cessation programs, fitness programs, obesity programs for children, and the purchase of exercise equipment, and qualified weight loss programs.

As the charge of the Commission is to look at the benefit of tax incentives to stimulate participation in these activities, the work of the Commission will undoubtedly be focused on evaluating the cost vs. benefit implications to both the State and the individual. MedChi supports such an analysis and believes there may be tax mechanisms that prove

The Honorable Thomas M. Middleton
Senate Bill 851
Page Two

effective in stimulating healthy lifestyle choices. MedChi would make one observation regarding the work of this Commission. Because its focus is on tax incentives, the benefits of any such recommendations will only benefit those with incomes sufficient to pay taxes and thus take advantage of applicable deductions or credits. MedChi would urge the Commission to broaden its focus to encompass incentives that may benefit those at lower incomes as well.

With its observation noted, MedChi requests a favorable report as it remains in strong support of encouraging and incentivizing healthy life style choices.

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