

SENATE No. 810

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand Nine

An Act to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in the Commonwealth..

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The General Court finds and declares that:

2 (a) disparities in health and health care are widespread in Massachusetts, and such
3 inequalities compromise the health and well being of racial and ethnic minorities, and impact all
4 Massachusetts residents;

5 (b) health disparities result from a range of social and economic factors that are not
6 limited to healthcare, but also include education and employment, neighborhoods and housing,
7 bias, discrimination and a variety of social determinants;

8 (c) addressing health disparities for racial and ethnic minorities is important to
9 eliminating disparities for other underserved populations including affected gender groups,
10 sexual minorities, geographically isolated communities and persons with disabilities; and

11 (d) an effective state strategy to eliminate disparities must be comprehensive and include
12 interventions that coordinate policies and efforts across state systems, agencies, and programs

13 SECTION 2. Section 16 of Chapter 6A of the General Laws is hereby amended by
14 inserting after the words “(7) the health facilities appeal board,” the following: –

15 (8) the office of health equity.

16 SECTION 3. The second sentence of the first paragraph of Section 16O of Chapter 6A of
17 the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after the words, “The council shall make
18 recommendations,” the following:- to the director of the office of health equity.

19 SECTION 4. The first sentence of the second paragraph of Section 16O of Chapter 6A of
20 the General Laws is hereby amended by striking the figure “34” and inserting in place thereof the
21 following:- 35, and by inserting after the words “secretary of health and human services,” the
22 following:- the director of the office of health equity,.

23 SECTION 5. Chapter 6A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
24 section 16S the following section: –

25 SECTION 16T. There shall be an office of health equity within the executive office of
26 health and human services. The office shall be in the charge of a director, who shall report
27 directly to the secretary of health and human services. The health disparities council, described in
28 section 160, shall serve as an advisory board to the office of health equity.

29 SECTION 6. The General Laws are hereby amended by inserting after Chapter 111M the
30 following chapter:–

31 CHAPTER 111N.

32 OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY.

33 Section 1. As used in this chapter, the following words shall, unless the context clearly
34 requires otherwise, have the following meanings: –

35 “Disparities” or “Racial and Ethnic Health and Health Care Disparities”, differences in
36 the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions
37 that exist among specific racial and ethnic groups.

38 “Office”, the office of health equity, as created in section 16T of chapter 6A.

39 Section 2. The office shall coordinate all activities of the commonwealth to eliminate
40 racial and ethnic health and health care disparities. The office shall set goals for the reduction of
41 disparities, and prepare an annual plan for the commonwealth to eliminate disparities.

42 Section 3. The office shall collaborate with other state agencies of the commonwealth on
43 disparities reduction initiatives to address the social factors that influence health inequality.
44 These state agencies shall include, but are not limited to, the executive offices of health and
45 human services, housing and economic development, public safety, energy and environmental
46 affairs, transportation and public works, labor and workforce development, and education.

47 The Office shall facilitate between these agencies, communication and partnership to
48 develop greater understanding of the intersections between agency activities and health
49 outcomes. The Office will facilitate development of interagency initiatives to address the social
50 and economic determinants of health and key health disparities issues such as but not limited to
51 healthcare access and quality; housing availability and quality; transportation availability,
52 location and cost; community policing and safe spaces; air, water, and land usage and quality;
53 employment and workforce development; and education access and quality.

54 Section 4. The Office shall evaluate effectiveness of programs and interventions to
55 eliminate health disparities, identifying best practices and model programs for the state.

56 Section 5. The secretary of health and human services shall annually, on the day assigned
57 for submission of the budget to the general court pursuant to section 7H of chapter 29, designate
58 major initiatives of the Commonwealth affecting the health and health care of residents of the
59 Commonwealth. Such initiatives may include any activity of the Commonwealth, including, but
60 not limited to, activities of the executive offices of health and human services, housing and
61 economic development, public safety, energy and environment, transportation and public works,
62 labor and workforce development, and education.

63 For each such major initiative, the office shall prepare a disparities impact statement
64 evaluating the likely positive or negative impact of each initiative on eliminating or reducing
65 racial and ethnic health disparities. The statements shall, to the extent possible, include
66 quantifiable impacts and evaluation benchmarks. The statements shall be posted on the internet
67 site of the executive office of health and human services and submitted to the clerks of the house
68 and senate, members of the health disparities council, appropriate legislative committees, and the
69 house and senate committees on ways and means.

70 Section 6. The office shall prepare an annual health disparities report card. The report
71 card shall evaluate the progress of the commonwealth towards eliminating racial and ethnic
72 health disparities, using, where possible, quantifiable measures and comparative benchmarks.
73 The report card shall report on progress on a regional basis, based on regions designated by the
74 office. The office shall hold public hearings in several regions of the state to get public
75 information on the topics of the report card. The report card shall be delivered to the governor,

76 speaker of the house of representatives and president of the senate and the members of the health
77 disparities council, created under section 16O of Chapter 6A, before July 1 each year, and shall
78 be posted on an internet site of the office or executive office of health and human services.