

February 2, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher
Vice Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 311 – Maryland Health Care Heroes Protection Act -- Support

Dear Chairman Smith and Vice Chairman Waldstreicher:

On behalf of Holy Cross Health, I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 311 – Maryland Health Care Heroes Protection Act. This legislation will amend an existing section of the Public Safety Article that provides liability protections for health care workers and facilities for an act committed in good faith during a catastrophic health emergency.

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented and challenging impact on our frontline health care workers as they have faced this global pandemic with compassion and determination. For nearly a year, Holy Cross Health has been in the forefront of the pandemic in Maryland, diagnosing the first COVID-19 patient in the state on March 4, 2020, and then becoming the dominant provider of critically ill COVID patients in the first wave of the pandemic. In these last 11 months, and through the second surge, Holy Cross Health has cared for more than 2,800 hospitalized COVID patients and 2,500 outpatients, many of whom were of minority and vulnerable populations.

From the start of this health crisis, Holy Cross Health and the other Maryland hospitals have met the challenges, first by overcoming shortages of PPE and testing reagents, adapting to evolving clinical guidelines, building more facility capacity, complying with state and federal standards and requirements (such as suspending elective surgeries), and now scaling up to provide community vaccinations -- all while caring for critically ill patients and striving to soothe anxious families and loved ones.

Further, Maryland hospitals have faced these challenges without reservation, while knowing that some of our health care colleagues are not covered under current Maryland law that provides liability protections for some but not others during a declared catastrophic health emergency. Hospitals began to address this oversight last spring with the Hogan administration but quickly came to believe that, with our shared baptism-by-fire experiences, we had an obligation to not only advocate for liability protection for our current workforce, but to advocate for the future health care workforce, with the almost certain knowledge that another coronavirus or other deadly infectious disease will strike again.

The Maryland Health Care Heroes Act would simply update the liability protections for those who have been actively fighting on the frontline of this pandemic and allow them to make good faith and necessary decisions without fear of personal liability. This will place Maryland in line with 28 other states that have enacted liability protections for health care workers since the pandemic began.

On behalf of Holy Cross Health and our dedicated workforce and the communities we serve, I respectfully request your support of SB 311 and urge you to vote for a favorable committee report on this worthy and important legislative measure.

Sincerely,



Norvell V. Coots, M.D.
President & CEO

c. Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee