

Hearing Date: February 3, 2021

Committee: Judiciary

Bill: HB 25: Catastrophic Health Emergencies- Health Care Providers – Definition and Immunity (Maryland Health Care Heroes Protection Act)

Position: SUPPORT

I'm writing to you today in **support of HB 25, the Maryland Health Care Heroes Protection Act.**

Having worked as a physician assistant (PA) since 2006, I have found myself in a variety of fields. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was employed at a suburban emergency department and worked for an outpatient community mental health agency in an adjoining state. While the emergency department volumes dropped, the patients who did arrive were significantly more ill. The emergency department staffing company was different from the hospital, and there were concerns about cross-deploying PAs to serve in other avenues to due legal and licensure constraints and so I was furloughed. Financial concerns aside, this was also a significant blow to my identity: I am a licensed healthcare provider, facing a public health emergency, and was not being utilized the full extent of my training and license because of concerns of liability and confusion about scope of practice limitations.

Luckily, I was able to pivot to assist the county health department. At first, I served in a clinical role, taking on patient care services in the reproductive health clinic to free up staff. After we shut down to in-person services, I helped with telehealth care of patients while relying on community partners to help with complaints that required in-person visits. And as the pandemic continued, my skill set was utilized in other ways: I trained staff on specimen collection, created procedures and scripts for the contact tracing team, served as a liaison for the sheriff's department to keep local law enforcement staff safe, and now am working to assist with vaccine roll-out.

However, given my status as a contractor for the health department, I am not always protected under the same liability umbrella. I remain concerned about the potential for future lawsuits and have paid for my own personal malpractice insurance for further protection.

Maryland's healthcare providers and health department staff have served in crisis mode for nearly a year on the front lines - caring for the people of Maryland 24/7 during this public health emergency. My colleagues and I across the state have drastically changed how we operate to save lives and care for our patients and the population at large. We continue to face the unknown with courage- but we are scared of what will happen in the months and years to come.

The unprecedented demands of the pandemic response combined with countless federal and state orders and directives have caused potential legal vulnerabilities for Maryland's physicians, PAs, and NPs. Existing liability protections in Maryland law need to be updated and clarified to reflect the unique challenges facing us right now.


To help, I ask you to **support HB 25, the Maryland Health Care Heroes Protection Act.** This bill ensures that those caring for Marylanders during a catastrophic health emergency are protected from

unsubstantiated lawsuits. It acknowledges the disruption to all aspects of care delivery and extends liability protections for 180 days after the emergency ends.

This bill brings Maryland in line with 28 other states and Washington, D.C, which have enacted protections for their hospitals and health care workers since this pandemic began.

Please help our state's frontline health care workers and support the Maryland Health Care Heroes Protection Act by voting in favor of HB 25.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deanna Bridge Najera". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deanna Bridge Najera, MPAS, MS, PA-C, DFAAPA
Physician Assistant and Nationally Certified Counselor

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