

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland State Senate
Before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Submitted by Rosemary Wertz, Field Coordinator with AFT Healthcare-Maryland
March 2, 2022
Senate Bill 578 – State Prescription Drug Benefits – Retirees
Position - Support**

Good afternoon Chairman and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

I am Rosemary Wertz, Field Coordinator for AFT Healthcare-Maryland, the exclusive bargaining representative for Healthcare Professionals in Maryland State government. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 578. Our bargaining unit includes Registered Nurses, Physicians, Therapists and Counselors. Our healthcare professionals know when they accept employment with Maryland State Government that they will not make a competitive salary. They accept much lower wages in exchange for other benefits. Prescription benefits in retirement were part of the deal. Our members have made much less money while working, thinking they would need less in retirement due to the continuation of benefits. For some, it is too late for them to adjust their retirement plans to offset the reduction in benefits.

For instance, I spoke with a member this week who retired July 1, 2021 because she was undergoing treatment for cancer. She worked for the state for over 16 years, which she thought qualified her for full benefits in retirement. The state did not notify her of the change in the law in 2011. She continued working for the state thinking she had full benefits in retirement for many years. When she called me, she was very concerned because the cost of her medicine was more than her retirement allowance for the month. She does not know if she will need additional treatment in the future. If you pass this bill, she will not have to worry about paying for her treatment in the future.

Other employees hired prior to 2011 that are still working may need to take a job in the private sector with a higher salary prior to retirement to offset the additional prescription cost. We urge the committee to consider the nursing shortage that has existed for decades and has now expanded to include all healthcare professionals. Nationwide job statistics show an alarming number of people opting to leave the workforce over the last couple of years. The recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals has become more difficult since the start of the pandemic. During a Labor Management Committee meeting this week, management at Western Maryland Hospital Center reported having successfully hired RN's at their recent job fair. They said they came for the benefits. Erosion of any benefits for state employees will negatively impact recruitment and retention. AFT Healthcare-Maryland supports SB 578 and urges a favorable vote from this committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemary L. Wertz
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