



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 23, 2022

Senate Bill 734- Primary Care Commission

### **Position: SUPPORT**

Chair Kelly, Vice Chair Feldman and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) wishes to provide supportive testimony for SB 734-Primary Care Commission. This bill would establish a commission to ultimately improve access to quality, affordable primary care throughout the state of Maryland. The number of primary care providers are declining in our state.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true in rural communities. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population.

This bill responds to a recommendation of the 2018 Maryland Rural Health Plan which states:

One of the largest barriers to rural health is the recruitment and retention of providers. Virtually all data sources emphasized the difficulty of both finding qualified providers to work in rural areas and then retaining them once hired. This problem exists across disciplines, affecting primary care providers, specialists, behavioral health physicians, and oral health providers. To correct the problem, policy makers, administrators, rural health professionals, and others need to study barriers to recruitment and retention and identify best practices. After completion, an action plan to make changes should be developed and enacted to improve Maryland's rural health.<sup>2</sup>

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Supporting initiatives that respond to rural health care workforce needs is our top advocacy priority for this year. MRHA urges the committee's favorable review.

*Board President, Jenifer Berkman, 443-783-0480*

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Department of Health. <https://health.maryland.gov/pophealth/Documents/Rural%20Health/MDRH-Plan-2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Department of Health, Maryland Rural Health Association, Rural Maryland Council and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2018) [Recommendations – Maryland Rural Health Plan \(mdruralhealthplan.org\)](https://mdruralhealthplan.org/)