

**JOSELINE A. PEÑA-MELNYK**

*Legislative District 21*  
Prince George's and  
Anne Arundel Counties

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*Vice Chair*

Health and Government  
Operations Committee

*Subcommittees*

Insurance and Pharmaceuticals

Chair, Public Health and  
Minority Health Disparities



*The Maryland House of Delegates*

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

*Annapolis Office*

The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 241  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3502 · 301-858-3502  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3502  
Joseline.Pena.Melnyk@house.state.md.us

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*District Office*

P. O. Box 1251  
College Park, Maryland 20741-1251

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**House Bill 1084: COVID-19 Response Act of 2022**  
**Testimony of Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk (FWA)**

Chairman Pendergrass and fellow members of the Committee, I present to you House Bill (HB) 1084. Last year, I sponsored the COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing and Vaccination Act of 2021 with my District 21 colleague, Senator Rosapepe. This bill passed unanimously in the House and in the Senate. It was vetoed by the Governor. In Special Session, the Governor's veto was overridden and the bill became law. The 2021 legislation created a multifaceted plan to manage the COVID-19 crisis, subsequent recover and address the aftermath. What HB 1084 now does is update last year's plan.

With new COVID cases continuing to fall, now we have time to focus on preparedness for the next surge, if it were to occur. This is the time to look in our toolbox and make sure our state and local health departments, our hospitals and our nursing homes are equipped with the tools necessary to recover from the recent crisis and to proactively position for a future one.

HB 1084 extends to 2023 provisions pertaining to vaccination and testing. Now that COVID treatments are available, HB 1084 adds provisions addressing promotion and distribution of these treatments. Finally, we would be remiss in introducing legislation that deals with COVID-19 response without addressing the tremendous toll the COVID-19 crisis has had on our healthcare workforce. To this end, we have worked closely with the Board of Nursing and the Healthcare Facilities Association of Maryland to increase our nursing assistant workforce. HB 1084 includes provisions that allow individuals who have been practicing as temporary nursing assistants, under a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) waiver applicable to the Federal Code of Regulations for Nursing Services [42 CFR 483.35(d)], to use

the hands-on experience they have acquired towards Nursing Board certification requirements.

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted a long-standing problem – over-utilization of Emergency Departments by patients who don't need acute care. We worked with the Health Services Cost Review Commission and others to address this. The bill proposes a plan to direct patients first to local urgent care centers for initial evaluation, and redirect them to hospitals when needed. This jointly developed strategy will permit Emergency Departments to attend to sicker patients more promptly.

Senator Rosapepe and I have worked cooperatively with multiple stakeholders and listened carefully to our constituents. We have amended HB 1084, and its cross-file Senate Bill 840, to reflect their feedback. Most importantly, we have entirely removed language surrounding pharmacist privileges as well as COVID-19 vaccine passports. We will continue working with stakeholders to ensure a well-rounded and equitable COVID-19 Response Act of 2022. Thank you for allowing me to present HB 1084. I respectfully request your favorable report.