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February 10, 2022

To: The House Health Government Operations Committee

From: Adventist HealthCare

Re: HB407 – Health Care Heroes Act of 2022

POSITION: SUPPORT

On behalf of Adventist HealthCare and our more than 5,000 employees, we urge you to pass HB407. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, our hospitals and healthcare workers have been on the front lines, serving our communities and treating patients. We worked to ensure patients had continued access to care and partnered with the Department of Health to reopen Washington Adventist Hospital to serve as an alternative care site with 200 beds reserved for COVID patients. This site remains open and active as a critical safety valve for hospitals when infections surge.

Adventist HealthCare also gladly stepped in and supported our public health infrastructure throughout the pandemic. We provided free COVID testing clinics in the community in 2020 and supported the vaccine rollout by establishing three community-based clinics and where we administered nearly 100,000 vaccines to our community. Hospitals and healthcare workers have indisputably answered the *ongoing* call in response to this pandemic and now we need help ensuring we can continue to do so.

We are facing a workforce crisis like no other. We face shortages of nurses, doctors, therapists and technologists. Our turnover rate has grown by nearly 50% in the past two years and is highest among nurses. Due to a lack of medical professionals in the pipeline, it is extremely challenging to find replacements for these positions, and we are forced to turn to staffing agencies. Unfortunately, these agencies have drastically increased their contract rates and our expenses on agency staff have tripled from early 2020 to the end of 2021.

These issues create complicated staffing challenges. HB407 will provide critical flexibilities when we need them the most. The flexibilities established under this bill mirror those that hospitals have under a public health emergency. By creating this 'workforce emergency' the Health Secretary will be able to provide this relief without the necessity of a full-blown emergency declaration from the Governor. It is our belief and hope that this declaration can be more responsive to hospital experiences in real time. Although this bill does not address the long-term staffing challenges hospitals face, it does create a vehicle to provide critical relief in our most challenging circumstances.

Please support HB407 and issue a favorable report.

