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HB274 Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times
FAVORABLE
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 21, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Pena-Melynk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. I am Karen Kalla, member of the AARP Maryland Executive Council and resident of Anne Arundel County. AARP MD and its members support HB274 Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times. We thank Delegates Bhandari, Forbes, Andre Johnson, Steven Johnson, and Delegate Kaiser for co-sponsoring this important legislation.

AARP is the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing the interests of Americans aged 50 and older and their families. Key priorities of our organization include helping all Marylanders achieve financial and health security and supporting safety net for seniors and low-income households in the state of Maryland is a priority.

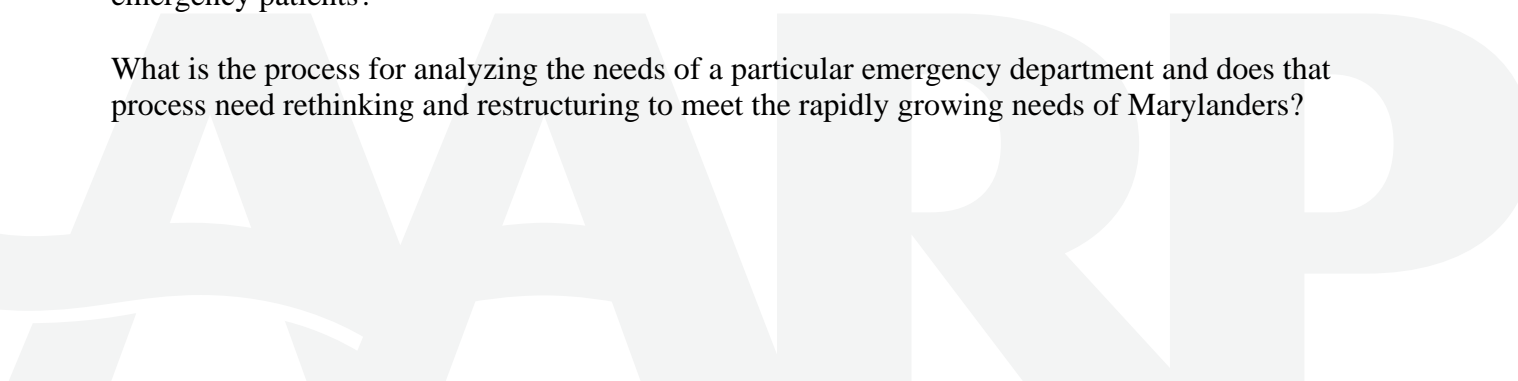
HB274 would create a task force comprised of representatives from the Senate, House, Secretary of Health, Maryland Hospital Association, patient advocacy organizations, and emergency department medical staff. The Task Force would be tasked with identifying potential solutions to reduce excessive wait times in emergency departments including the study of states with a population similar to Maryland's and that rank within the top 50% of states with the shortest emergency room wait time.

The fact that Maryland has one of the longest Emergency Department wait-times in the country, compels the establishment of this Task Force to research the causes. No person who is in urgent need of immediate medical attention should have to wait up to four hours or longer to be examined and treated as found necessary. The reasons are many and this situation the result of complex factors—factors that this Task Force should thoughtfully investigate and address.

Hospitals have inadequate space and beds, are often short on staff, and the staff available is often overworked. Why is this the case in Maryland more so than other states in the country? What do they know and practice that we do not?

Are any current State laws complicating or discouraging the expansion of emergency department or other hospital services that could provide space and staff to more expeditiously process emergency patients?

What is the process for analyzing the needs of a particular emergency department and does that process need rethinking and restructuring to meet the rapidly growing needs of Marylanders?



How are hospital budgets designed to provide funding adequate to ensure that emergency departments can truly provide emergency care in a timely fashion?

How can Maryland better organize a medical system where those who need attention by a medical doctor, but not an emergency department are identified and steered to the proper place?

Examples of long emergency department wait times are endless. In my father's later years, as with many seniors, we more often than we wanted, ended up in the emergency room in Montgomery County. Towards my father's last few years, whenever his primary care physician would send him from his office to the ER, the doctor would call an ambulance to ensure my father received the immediate attention he needed—a well-established practiced by those in the know.

The introduction of HB274 recognizes the urgency of this situation and creates a process to address it for the well-being of all Marylanders.

AARP MD respectfully asks for the Committee to give HB274 a Favorable report. If you have any questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan at tbresnahan@aarp.org. or by calling 410-302-8451.