

**HB0274: Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 21, 2023
Position: Support with Amendment**

The Arc Maryland and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council are statewide organizations that work to protect and advance the rights and quality of life of people with disabilities. This bill would establish the Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times. The Task Force shall have a defined scope for their duties which include studying best practices for reducing emergency department wait times and making recommendations regarding best practices for reducing wait times in the state of Maryland.

We support HB0274 with a proposed amendment to the duties of the Task Force.

Maryland has the longest Emergency Room (ER) wait time of any state at 228 minutes.¹ With an average wait time of almost four hours, frustrated patients may leave without the treatment they need or may suffer irreparable harm if their condition is one that deteriorates with time. We believe the work of this task force is important: to examine other states with population sizes comparable to Maryland (Indiana, Missouri, and Wisconsin) and identify common practices that may contribute to their significantly shorter wait times, analyze, and provide recommendations for improvements to the emergency room practices in Maryland to help reduce current wait times.

We believe that data should also be collected from ER patients in Maryland and analyzed to see if there are any correlations between racial and disability demographics and length of wait times. This may help us to see if people with disabilities, or people experiencing behavioral health crisis are in the Emergency Room longer. A study showed that Black and Hispanic patients experienced longer ER wait times² but there is not much known about the wait times of people with disabilities, especially those who may be waiting on inpatient bed capacity. We believe this data may be useful in determining recommendations regarding best practices for improvements.

The amendment we propose is as follows:

(f) The Task Force shall:

(1) identify potential solutions to reduce excessive wait times in emergency departments in the State;

(2) study best practices for emergency department staffing, triage, and bed availability in states that:

(i) have a population similar to Maryland; (ii) have at least one city of approximately 500,000 residents; and

(iii) rank within the top 50% of states in shortest emergency room wait time;

(3) collect and analyze Maryland ER data for correlations between ER patient demographics, to include race and disability, and ER wait times.

[(3)] (4) make recommendations regarding best practices for reducing emergency department wait times that should be implemented in the State.

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¹ <https://www.wmar2news.com/news/local-news/maryland-has-longest-hospital-wait-times-of-any-state-study-finds>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33812329/>