



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 20, 2024

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 718 – Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee - Establishment – Letter of Support With Amendments

Dear Chair Beilde and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of support with amendments for Senate Bill (SB) 718 – Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee - Establishment.

SB 718 will create the Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program in the Maryland Department of Health and require the Secretary to establish a pilot program at community colleges in at least two geographically diverse areas in the State that offer licensed practical nursing programs before implementing the Program statewide. SB 718 also establishes the Maryland Pathway to Nursing Advisory Committee to assist in the development of the Program.

The MDH Office of Population Health Improvement (OPHI) houses health care workforce and access activities for the MDH that focus on provider recruitment and retention in areas of the state experiencing workforce shortages including the Conrad 30 (J-1 Visa Waiver) Program, Income Tax Credit for Preceptors in Areas with Health Care Workforce Shortages Programs, and the Maryland Loan Repayment Programs. However, OPHI does not have subject matter expertise in this area. Because of that, SB 718 as written will have both fiscal and operational impacts on MDH at an estimated cost ranging from \$356,842 to \$406,334 throughout program implementation. These costs include significant anticipated staffing needs. In light of this, sponsors may want to consider amending this proposal to place this program with a more appropriate agency with relevant expertise. While MDH has expertise in health professions recruitment and retention efforts and health care workforce analysis, other agencies may have the needed expertise in educational training efforts and direct-to-student scholarship and stipend programming.

As acknowledged in both the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Nurses and Nursing Support Staff Workgroup and the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis, MDH recognizes the need to correct the discrepancies between Maryland's healthcare needs and the nurse workforce, and the requirement of a multi-pronged approach that equally recruits and

retains healthcare providers to serve in Maryland’s communities. Both recruitment, “attracting current health professionals and students to open positions or to future positions,” and retention, “keeping healthcare professionals employed in their healthcare facilities and communities,” are vital strategies in developing and maintaining a strong workforce. According to a 2022 report released by the Maryland Hospital Association, the shortfall of nurses is expected to double or even triple in the future. The report projects that by 2035, 13,800 additional RNs and 9,200 additional LPNs will be needed.¹

Developing workforce programming across the educational continuum should focus on keeping costs associated with training pathways affordable. Examples provided by the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MLARP) for Nurses and Nursing Support Staff Workgroup to support students with associated educational costs across the education continuum include offering scholarships for tuition and programming/stipends for supportive services for enrolled students (for example, full-time pay during part-time enrollment, transportation, housing, childcare).

If you have any further questions, please contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

¹ GlobalData for the Maryland Hospital Association. Maryland Nurse Workforce Projections:2021 – 2035, June 2022: <https://www.mhaonline.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/maryland-nurse-workforce-projections-globaldata.pdf>