



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

February 2, 2024

House bill 0354: Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee - Establishment

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0354: Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee – Establishment.

The current nursing shortage is a multifactorial issue that requires a complex solution. From baby boomer nurses entering retirement, nursing burnout, and poor retention, the demand of nurses is not complementary to the supply of new nurses entering and remaining in the workforce. Hospitals have implemented interventions to combat the shortage, such as hiring travel nurses, increasing patient ratios, and overtime incentives, but none of these interventions are long-term solutions. According to the Maryland Hospital Association’s Maryland Nurse Workforce Projections: 2021-2035, in 2021 the supply of available nurses and licensed practice nurses (LPNs) was 91% and 69% of the demand respectively. By 2035, the percentage of supplied nurses and LPNs will decrease by 80% and 44% respectively, based upon predicted hospital utilization (2022). Considering the current impacts on hospital function and patient outcomes, action should be taken now to rectify the issue before the projected conditions become worse in 2035. The Maryland Rural Health Association strongly recommends the establishment of the Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program outlined in HB0354 as it will improve staffing in hospitals while supporting current certified nursing assistants (CNAs) to further their career. Offering financial assistance to pursue this pathway will remove a large barrier that many CNAs (especially in diverse areas) face. Piloting the program in diverse areas will also likely empower the community to pursue a career in healthcare, ultimately contributing to improving the shortage. Whether program participants pursue the LPN or RN licensure, it will help supply the steep demands of nurses and LPNs required to properly staff hospitals. With proper staffing and better working conditions, the turnover for nurses, LPNs, and CNAs will also improve. As a result, patient outcomes will improve, and Maryland will be able to deliver the highest quality of care to its residents.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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