Maryland
Hospital Association

Senate Bill 718- Maryland Pathway to Nursing Pilot Program and Advisory Committee – Establishment

Position: *Support as Amended in the Senate*
April 2, 2024
House Health & Government Operations Committee

MHA Position

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 718 as amended in the Senate.

The amendments place this program under the purview of the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). We support this decision given MHEC's successful implementation of the Nurse Support I and II Programs.

Maryland hospitals continue to experience workforce shortages. The latest data show high vacancy rates in Maryland hospitals for:

- Licensed practical nurses (LPN), 16.8%
- Nurse practitioners, 12.3%
- Registered nurses (RN), 12.1%

Vacancies for RNs vary by region. In Southern Maryland, for example, the vacancy rate is more than double the statewide rate—30.6%. A 2022 GlobalData report estimates a statewide shortage of 5,000 full-time registered nurses and 4,000 licensed practical nurses[1]. Without intervention, shortages could double or even triple by 2035. MHA's 2022 State of Maryland's Health Care Workforce report outlines a roadmap to ensure Maryland has the health care workforce it needs now and in the future[2]. The recommendations focus on four areas: expand Maryland's workforce pipeline, remove barriers to health care education, retain the health care workforce, and leverage talent with new care models.

SB 718 provides a blueprint, aligned with MHA's recommendations, to grow and diversify the nursing workforce pipeline. The Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program will invest in Marylanders interested in a nursing career, who commit to practice in the state. The program seeks to alleviate the workforce shortage, diversify the nursing workforce, and support program participants financially through assistance with basic living expenses like food, housing and transportation.

A diverse health care workforce improves access for underserved groups, improves health

outcomes, and reduces disparities. Access to wraparound services (e.g., childcare, tutoring, transportation assistance) supports nontraditional students and individuals from underserved populations to access education and complete programs. On average 20% of nursing students will drop out, with most dropping out after the first semester[3]. The Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program addresses these social drivers to support success.

Before expanding statewide, the bill establishes pilot sites and creates an Advisory Committee to evaluate the time frame of the pilot, identify the focus areas and what resources are needed. This stepwise process will identify issues and address concerns prior to expanding statewide.

Maryland hospitals are engaging in creative and collaborative efforts to grow the workforce. For example, to address the high demand for certified nursing assistants (CNAs), many hospitals have designed an acute care CNA pathway to upskill their existing employees. Hospitals are partnering with community colleges to establish apprenticeship programs for high-demand positions. There is significant interest in all of these programs, but space is limited. This legislation will allow the state to build on the success of these programs, incorporate lessons learned, and help Maryland grow our own health care workforce.

Demand for health care services will only increase and will require a robust workforce across the care continuum. Between 2021 and 2035, demand for RNs is expected to grow 50% in nursing homes alone[1]. We need the state's support and investment now to ensure we have the health care workforce to care for all Marylanders

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[1] GlobalData (June, 2022). Maryland Nurse Workforce Projections: 2021-2035

[2] MHA Workforce Survey – January 2023

[3] Nancy Elkins. Failure to Complete BSN Nursing Programs: Students' Views. 2019. Retrieved from files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1252119.pdf.