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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 354

Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee – Establishment

Good afternoon, Chairman Peña-Melnyk and honorable members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present HB 354 **Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee – Establishment**. This bill is brought to you as a response to the severe nursing shortage that we have discussed and begun to address this session. The bill offers both a short and long-term solution by establishing a pathway to becoming a nurse with wrap-around services that will ensure a greater success rate. Last year, this Committee and the House passed this measure unanimously. While it did not move forward in the Senate, I think this is the year, as the nursing shortage is still severe, and this bill offers concrete solutions that will result in more nurses .

The underlying theme throughout our committee's work is the nursing shortage. We cannot move forward with improving health outcomes, addressing health disparities, and making our health system efficient without addressing the nursing shortage. The bill embodies one of the final recommendations of the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis. The Commission submitted its final report to the Maryland General Assembly last month after two years of extensive study. The Commission was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 2022.

I know that everyone in this Committee is committed to supporting opportunities to uplift each and every Marylander and help them to advance. By helping individuals in their efforts to advance their education and career prospects, we are supporting those individuals, their families, and their communities.

This bill brings both of those goals together. The Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program supports nursing students early in their education career, increasing the likelihood that they will successfully complete their degrees and enter the nursing profession.

I decided to introduce this bill when I learned about the high rate of attrition for nursing students. With nursing schools full, we cannot afford to lose one student. Yet attrition rates among nursing students is about 25%, with even higher rates for Black and brown students.

The research shows attrition rates for nursing students is high because nursing students are older with more family obligations including childcare and elder care. Being older, they are also likely working. Many nursing students work their way through school as certified nursing assistants (CNAs). While their CNA experience enriches their education, it also creates logistical challenges because of clinical schedules. This situation is clearly explained in a blog post at [We need to fix the broken nursing career pathway—here's how \(newamerica.org\)](#).

The Maryland Pathways to Nursing will provide individualized support to nursing students at the beginning of their nursing education, as they complete the path to licensed practical nursing (LPN). Some will begin the program as CNAs, but we may see students working in other areas of health care, including direct support staff. After becoming LPNs, they can practice and contribute to the nursing field. They are also well-positioned to continue their education pathway to become registered nurses (RNs).

Thank you for your consideration of this approach to increasing our nursing workforce. I humbly ask for your favorable support.

This innovative program has a precedent in Maryland. Over a year ago, Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski launched the Public Health Pathways Program, based on similar principles in this bill. We have a representative from Baltimore County to discuss the implementation of that Program. HB 354 starts with the building blocks of the Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program. An advisory committee – comprised of nursing educators, community colleges, HBCUs, health industry leaders, and most importantly nursing students – will advise the Secretary of Health on the structure of the program. Contingent on funding, the Program will launch at two or more community colleges in diverse geographic areas. From the initial experience, the Department of Health will continue to work with stakeholders to determine how to scale the program successfully across all regions of Maryland.

I wanted to mention that I will be introducing sponsor amendments that will clarify that the program will begin as a pilot at at least two geographically diverse community colleges. Also, the amendments clarify that the program will not cover tuition, as these students are likely eligible for existing financial assistance programs. The bill instead focuses the attention of the program on the critical wrap-around services, such support for child care and transportation, that can keep nursing students in school. My sponsor amendments will make the bill identical to the crossfile, SB 718 as sponsored by Senators Lam and McKay.

Thank you for your consideration and the Committee's partnership in addressing Maryland's workforce shortage. I respectfully request a favorable report.