



**Senate Bill 216-
Health Occupations - Nursing - Loan Repayment, Education, and Sunset Extension
(Building Opportunities for Nurses Act of 2025)**

Position: *Support with Amendments*

January 28, 2025

Senate Finance 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 with amendments of Senate Bill 216.

Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants make up 42% of Maryland's hospital workforce. The latest hospital data from Q3 2024 show licensed practical nurses, nursing assistants, and registered nurses have high vacancy rates—28%, 17%, and 15%, respectively. These vacancies mean fewer caregivers are available to deliver care at the bedside.

In 2022, MHA supported Senate Bill 696, which established the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MLARP) Fund for Nurses and Nursing Support Staff (NNSS) to incentivize and support advanced practice registered nurses, nurses, and nursing assistants. MHA participated in the MLARP NSS Stakeholder Work Group, which was temporarily established by the passage of the law. Some of the Work Group's recommendations, included in its [final report](#), are included in SB 216 such as extending eligibility to individuals who work at for-profit entities. This will ensure applicants working at long-term care facilities can participate.

One recommendation not included in the bill is to create a permanent advisory council. We recommend amending the bill to include a permanent advisory council, using the Work Group's membership as a starting point. The draft amendment language is attached.

SB 216 includes other provisions MHA supports including extension of the Secretary of Health's authority over the Maryland Board of Nursing's infrastructure and operations for an additional five years. This partnership has been effective, allowing the Board to fill vacant positions and improve licensure processing times.

With a new online licensing system expected to launch in fall 2025, continued support from the Department of Health during this transition will be helpful. MHA also supports changes to the licensure-by-endorsement process. Removing barriers for nurses licensed in other states is essential.

This legislation provides comprehensive solutions to support Maryland's health care workforce. We would like to thank the Department and Board of Nursing for bringing the bill forward. We look forward to working together to ensure the passage of this important legislation.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report with amendments on SB 216.

For more information, please contact:

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SB 216 Draft Amendment

- A. IN THIS SECTION, "COUNCIL" MEANS THE MARYLAND LOAN ASSISTANCE REPAYMENT PROGRAM ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR NURSES.
- B. THERE IS A MARYLAND LOAN ASSISTANCE REPAYMENT PROGRAM ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR NURSES.
- C. THE COUNCIL CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS:
 - (1) THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH, OR THE SECRETARY'S DESIGNEE
 - (2) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE STATE BOARD OF NURSING
 - (3) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MARYLAND NURSES ASSOCIATION
 - (4) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE 1199 SEIU UNITED HEALTHCARE WORKERS EAST
 - (5) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HEALTH FACILITIES ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND
 - (6) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MARYLAND HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
 - (7) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF LIFESPAN NETWORK
 - (8) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF LEADING AGE MARYLAND
 - (9) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF AFSCME MARYLAND
 - (10) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NURSE PRACTITIONER ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND
 - (11) ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY HEALTH OFFICERS
 - (12) ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM A COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER
 - (13) TWO REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE MARYLAND SCHOOLS OF NURSING DEANS AND DIRECTORS
 - (14) ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM A NURSING ASSISTANT TRAINING PROGRAM
 - (15) ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE MARYLAND ACTION COALITION
 - (16) ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE MARYLAND RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
 - (17) TWO MARYLAND RESIDENTS WHO RECEIVED FUNDING THROUGH THE PROGRAM
 - (18) ANY OTHER STAKEHOLDER THAT THE DEPARTMENT DETERMINES APPROPRIATE.
- D.
 - (1) THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL SHALL SELECT THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL.
 - (2) A MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL:
 - (I) MAY NOT RECEIVE COMPENSATION AS A MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL; BUT
 - (II) IS ENTITLED TO REIMBURSEMENT FOR EXPENSES UNDER THE STANDARD STATE TRAVEL REGULATIONS, AS PROVIDED IN THE STATE BUDGET.
 - (3) THE COUNCIL SHALL MEET AT LEAST THREE TIMES A YEAR.
- E. THE DEPARTMENT SHALL PROVIDE STAFF FOR THE COUNCIL.
- F. THE COUNCIL SHALL:
 - (1) SEEK PERMANENT AND DIVERSE REVENUE SOURCES TO AID IN THE STABILITY AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM;
 - (2) HELP ENSURE MAXIMUM USE OF FEDERAL FUNDS;
 - (3) USE AVAILABLE DATA AND INFORMATION TO HELP DIRECT FUNDING TO PRIORITY AREAS;

(4) MONITOR SIMILAR LOAN PROGRAMS IN OTHER STATE AND ENSURE THAT THE PROGRAM REMAINS COMPETITIVE

(5) ASSIST THE DEPARTMENT IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM;

(6) HELP MARKET AND RAISE AWARENESS OF THE PROGRAM THROUGH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER APPROPRIATE ENTITIES AS AN INCENTIVE TO HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS TO PRACTICE IN UNDERSERVED AREAS; AND

(7) MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON ANY NECESSARY CHANGES TO THE PROGRAM.

G. ON OR BEFORE NOVEMBER 1 EACH YEAR, THE COUNCIL SHALL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH 2-1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNCIL.