

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Health Committee
HB 624: Hospitals – Clinical Staffing Committees and Plans – Establishment
Safe Staffing Act of 2026
February 18, 2026
SUPPORT**

Good afternoon Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the House Health Committee. AFT-Maryland is the certified bargaining representative for the hundreds of doctors who are Residents and Fellows at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore, as well as a number of nursing professionals at the state and local levels. On their behalf, we call on this committee to issue a favorable report to HB 624, the Safe Staffing Act of 2026.

It should be of no surprise to anyone in our state that, due high turnover, burnout, and poor working conditions, our hospitals are severely understaffed. This fact indeed has a negative impact on the quality-of-care our patients receive in Maryland. One-in-four nursing positions are vacant in Maryland, and studies show that these high vacancy rates have led to a 7% raise in the risk of death by a patient in our state. Maryland has, unfortunately, the longest ER wait times in the nation, with patients often waiting 20 hours or more to receive emergency care, due largely to staffing issues.

HB 624 asks that hospitals establish a committee, comprising 50% direct care workers, that would attempt to create a plan to address these staffing concerns and ensure staff-driven decisions for better care. By establishing safe staffing practices, we in Maryland can begin to reduce turnover and reliance on temporary staffing, lowering overall hospital costs. We can better retain experienced nurses, attract those who left the field, and bring students into the profession. HB 624 follows legislation in other states that have been successful in reversing staffing shortages: States like Oregon show that involving nurses in staffing decisions leads to lower turnover and better patient outcomes. But perhaps most importantly, we can improve the quality of care for the people of Maryland and save more lives when we require hospitals to include their front line staff on a staffing plan.

Again, for these reasons, AFT-Maryland calls on the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 624. Thank you.