



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Appropriations Committee

February 25, 2020

House Bill 998: Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

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Delegate Sample-Hughes, Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson, and members of the Appropriations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 998: Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding.

This legislation would transfer oversight of the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants from the Office of Student Financial Assistance within the Maryland Higher Education Commission to the Maryland Department of Health; etc.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

The 2018 Maryland Rural Health Plan ([www.MDRuralHealthPlan.org](http://www.MDRuralHealthPlan.org)), an extensive assessment of Maryland's rural health needs, specifically sites workforce shortages as a major concern for our rural communities. One of the largest barriers is the recruitment and retention of providers. Virtually all data sources emphasized the difficulty of both finding qualified providers to work in rural areas and then retaining them once hired. This problem exists across disciplines, affecting primary care providers, specialists, behavioral health physicians, and oral health providers.

Maryland's state funded loan assistance program, MLARP, allows providers to practice in a Medically Underserved Area (MUA) or in a rural county. MUAs are federally designated and determined based on the lack of primary care providers, high infant mortality rates, high poverty levels, and high percentage of elderly residents. There are 46 MUAs in Maryland. Some counties—Calvert, Caroline, Garrett, Kent, Somerset and Worcester—are designated MUAs in their entirety. The state-funded program, MLARP also allows recipients to apply to work in any of the 18 rural counties in the state. This legislation would improve program efficiency and enhance the ability to respond to a growing demand in underserved areas.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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