



Maryland  
Hospital Association

March 10, 2022

To: The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Chair, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

Re: Letter of Support- Senate Bill 716 - Maryland Health Care Workers Loan Assistance Program - Establishment and Funding

Dear Chair Guzzone:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 716.

More than 700 days have passed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, Maryland faces a staggering health care workforce crisis, with a 50% jump in hospital nurse vacancies in just five months. Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants make up 39% of the hospital workforce.<sup>1</sup> According to a 2020 analysis, Maryland's registered nurse (RN) population by capita is in the bottom third of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

SB 716 would establish a loan repayment program for nurses, physicians, physician assistants, and respiratory therapists. The Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MLARP) is a powerful and proven tool to retain and recruit primary care professionals—expanding access to care in underserved and rural areas. In exchange for loan repayment, physicians and physician assistants commit to practice in health professional shortage areas and/or areas identified by the state for at least two years. The program eases the burden of education debt for providers and expands access to care in areas of the state with the highest need. SB 716 would fill a gap in the state's program by allowing more physicians and physician assistants to participate in loan repayment and by providing a pathway for nurses and respiratory therapists.

A lack of faculty and clinical preceptors contributed to the more than 80,000 qualified applicants nationwide denied admission to baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2019.<sup>3</sup> Loan repayment would support recruitment and retention of the health care workforce overall and could encourage nurses to pursue advanced education. Easing the burden of educational loans also will support the needs of our health care workforce. SB 716 invests in the health of all Marylanders and the future pipeline of health care heroes.

For more information, please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> MHA Workforce Survey – February 2022. *Note: Data represents submissions by 49 of 51 Maryland hospitals (Survey Response Rate = 96.1%).*

<sup>2</sup> Becker's Hospital Review. (Feb. 18, 2022). "[RN population per capita, by state](#)"

<sup>3</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2019). Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions for Academic Year 2018-2019. Washington, DC.