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Operations Committee

Subcommittees

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and Long Term Care

Insurance and Pharmaceuticals

House Chair, Joint Committee on
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Health Occupations - Health Care Workforce Expansion- HB 1208
March 29rd, 2022

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and Members of the Committee

Thank you for allowing me to present HB 1208, Health Care Workforce Expansion which represents another piece of our efforts to address healthcare workforce issues in Maryland.

We've previously heard from the Maryland Hospital Association that nursing vacancies have increased 50% over the last six months. Our nursing workforce issues have been further impacted by the licensing and testing delays caused by the cyberattack on the Department of Health.

There are non-legislative efforts underway to alleviate this shortage: our nursing schools are adding slots to accommodate more students, graduating students early so they can begin work more quickly and recruiting additional faculty; Howard County Community College is establishing an apprenticeship model for learning; and hospitals are offering increased schedule flexibility, higher wages, and signing bonuses to attract and retain nursing staff. But significant challenges remain for the industry. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics expects an additional 500,000 nurses will quit this year, leaving us with a nationwide shortage of more than 1.1 million nurses.

As chair of the Health Occupations and Long Term Care Subcommittee, I pulled together an ad hoc group of stakeholders to brainstorm solutions to this crisis. HB 1208 is a result of that work. During consideration in the House, we further refined the legislation and the bill before you today has four goals:

1. **Expanding the Number of Nurse Preceptors** - One of the challenges discussed during stakeholder meetings is the shortage of nurses willing to serve as preceptors which makes it difficult to find clinical placements for nursing students. To address a similar problem with physician training, we established a tax credit against state income taxes for physicians and physician assistants who serve as preceptors. To incentivize more nurses to serve as preceptors, HB 1208 expands the program to offer tax credits for licensed practical nurses, nurse practitioners, and registered nurses.
2. **Creating a transition pathway for Temporary Nurse Aides** - When visiting restrictions were in place during the pandemic, many long term care facilities hired patients' family members as temporary nursing aides (TNA). This had the dual benefit of allowing family members to see their loved ones and assisted the facilities in meeting their workforce needs. More than 3100 of these individuals have taken the eight hour course to become employed as a TNA and approximately 2000 remain employed in our long term care facilities. However, once pandemic related licensing waivers expire, this workforce will need to transition to become certified nursing aides and HB 1208 authorizes the Board of Nursing to apply their on the job experience towards the training hours required to become an CNA.
3. **Studying an apprenticeship model for healthcare workforce** – The legislation will convene a workgroup to study expansion of the state apprentice programs to the healthcare workforce and to make recommendations on the fields that could be served by such programs, along with potential options to provide incentives for experienced practitioners to work with apprentices.
4. **Determining a long term funding source for a loan repayment program for nurses** - HB 1208 directs the Department of Health to convene a workgroup to examine the best way to expand the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program Fund to cover nurses. The budget contains a one time appropriation of \$2 million for nursing loan repayments but we need to figure out how to expand this program long term.

At the request of the Board of Nursing, the bill was amended with some technical changes and provisions requiring a marketing plan and one-stop shop website for nursing career information were struck. Also at the Board's request, we struck the provision moving the externship program that MEIMSS administered during the pandemic to a permanent home under the Board of Nursing. The Board committed to explore a similar co-op program that will achieve the same goals.

Two additional amendments were brought by stakeholders. The first clarified that online training can be used for educating Nursing Assistants. The Board of Nursing has requested that this amendment be changed to reflect that online training is appropriate for the didactic training but that clinicals must be in person and that the second amendment be struck. I concur with that request but am hopeful that the Board expedite approvals as quickly as possible to get workers into our healthcare facilities.

HB 1208 passed unanimously out of the Health and Government Operations Committee and passed the House 129-1.

I urge a favorable report.