



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE**

March 10, 2022

Senate Bill 716: Maryland Health Care Workers Loan Assistance Program - Establishment and Funding
Written Testimony Only

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

On behalf of the members of the Health Facilities Association of Maryland (HFAM), we appreciate the opportunity to express our support with amendments for Senate Bill 716. HFAM represents over 170 skilled nursing centers and assisted living communities in Maryland, as well as nearly 80 associate businesses that offer products and services to healthcare providers. Our members provide services and employ individuals in nearly every jurisdiction of the state

Senate Bill 716 establishes the Maryland Health Care Workers Loan Assistance Program to provide assistance to health care workers. We appreciate the intent of this legislation and agree that we should do all we can to support our health care workforce across all settings.

However, as currently written, this legislation does not include nursing assistants. These certified health care professionals play a critical role in providing care to Marylanders in need across settings and we believe they should be included in this legislation.

Therefore, we are supportive of Senate Bill 716 with an amendment to add nursing assistants to the group of health care workers who are eligible to participate in the Maryland Health Care Workers Loan Assistance Program. We respectfully request that the following be added to the definition of a "health care worker:"

- A GERIATRIC NURSING ASSISTANT, AS DEFINED IN § 8-6A-01(M) OF THE HEALTH OCCUPATIONS ARTICLE;
- A CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANT, AS DEFINED IN § 8-6A-01(J) OF THE HEALTH OCCUPATIONS ARTICLE;
- A CERTIFIED MEDICINE AIDE, AS DEFINED IN § 8-6A-01(I) OF THE HEALTH OCCUPATIONS ARTICLE; AND
- A CERTIFIED MEDICATION TECHNICIAN, AS DEFINED IN § 8-6A-01(H) OF THE HEALTH OCCUPATIONS ARTICLE.

Student loan debt owed by health care professionals, including nursing assistants, is not only a problem for the individual, but for the entire health care system. Baccalaureate degrees and other education costs for nurses and nursing assistants are a heavy burden. This is not only the case for initial degrees, but such costs hamper nursing career ladder advancements tied to education.

The financial assistance proposed by Senate Bill 716 will help increase the number of nursing assistants working in Maryland, make working in nursing more attractive to potential employees, and decrease staff turnover. This is now more important than ever as we are currently facing a health care workforce crisis in Maryland.

Workforce challenges such as recruitment and retention have long existed in health care, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have only grown worse over the last two years and they will likely remain even as we begin to navigate a post-pandemic world.

There is currently an extreme shortage of health care workers in a range of roles and particularly among nursing assistants. In 2021 the Maryland Board of Nursing reported that 40,000 licensed individuals in Maryland had chosen not to renew their professional license.

Nursing assistants are the backbone of many health care centers and this is especially true in long-term and post-acute care settings. Geriatric nursing assistants (GNAs) keep skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers running smoothly and keep residents and patients engaged, comfortable, and happy. They are extremely essential to not only long-term care, but to the entire care continuum.

Throughout the pandemic, all health care workers have proven themselves to be not just essential workers, but health care heroes. There are so many amazing stories of dedication, sacrifice, and compassion by these health care professionals who have gone above and beyond to ensure the safety, health, and happiness of residents and patients during these unprecedented times.

Considering the workforce challenges that our sector and many others face, it is more important than ever that we continue to support our health care workforce, including nursing assistants. As we plan our long-term “new normal” in health care, we must be intentional about creating quality health care jobs and growing careers. We are placing consideration attention on how education, on-the-job training, and experience can overlap and create incentives to produce more licensed health care professionals.

For these reasons and with our proposed amendments, we request a favorable report from the Committee on Senate Bill 716.

Submitted by:

Joseph DeMattos, Jr.
President and CEO
(410) 290-5132