Senate Bill 696- Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment for Nurses and Nursing Workers - Program Establishment and Funding

Position: *Support*
February 22, 2022
Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

MHA Position
On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 696.

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.[1] According to a 2020 analysis, Maryland's registered nurse (RN) population by capita is in the bottom third of the nation.[2]

SB 696 would establish a loan repayment program for nurses and nursing workers, modeled after the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants (MLARP). MLARP is a powerful 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.

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.[3] Loan repayment would support recruitment and retention of the nursing workforce and encourage nurses to pursue advanced education. SB 696 invests in the health of all Marylanders and the future pipeline of nurses we need to care for them.

For these reasons, we ask for a *favorable* report on SB 696.

For more information, please contact:
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[1] MHA Workforce Survey – February 2022. *Note: Data represents submissions by 49 of 51 Maryland hospitals (Survey Response Rate = 96.1%).*
[2] Becker's Hospital Review. (Feb. 18, 2022). "RN population per capita, by state"
[3] American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2019). Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions for Academic Year 2018-2019. Washington, DC.