



To: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Bill: SB 899 - Health Occupations Boards – Authority Over Staffing and Infrastructure Operations

Date: February 22, 2022

Position: Oppose

We appreciate the opportunity to be able to submit testimony in opposition to *Senate Bill 899 – Health Occupations Boards – Authority Over Staffing and Infrastructure Operations*. Our organizations are the Maryland Nurses Association, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors of Maryland, American College of Nurse Midwives – Maryland Affiliate, Maryland Occupational Therapy Association, and the National Association of Social Workers – Maryland.

The bill provides for general fund infrastructure support in exchange for the Secretary of Health having more authority over the boards. We agree that there is merit to considering the question of general fund support for licensure boards. These boards are Maryland’s front-line in ensuring quality of care, as they have the responsibility for ensuring health care practitioners meet standards for education, experience, and competency. Certain large projects, such as

building licensure databases or reinforcing cybersecurity systems, may be appropriate for some level of general funds, rather than be entirely funded from licensure fees.

However, we believe that this bill shifts too much authority over the boards to the Secretary. Occupational licensure boards are intended to have independent authority over licensure, disciplinary, and any policy issues that come before a board. While the bill attempts to shield these core functions from the Secretary's influence, we think that the reality will be different. By giving the Secretary authority to be involved in decision-making about an executive director and other staff, the bill essentially puts the Secretary in a supervisory role. It may be difficult for board staff to truly shield licensure and disciplinary decisions from someone with a level of authority over their employment.

We also question whether the Secretary of Health should be burdened with more management responsibilities over the boards. There are twenty-one health occupation boards, and one Secretary of Health. We want a Secretary of Health to be focused on strengthening the core public health infrastructure at the State- and community-levels. As we have seen during the pandemic, our public health systems are woefully under-resourced.

We ask for an unfavorable report. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net or Scott Tiffin at stiffin@policypartners.net.