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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 696 - Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment for Nurses and Nursing Workers – Program
Establishment and Funding
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 22, 2022

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 696 - Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment for Nurses and Nursing Workers – Program Establishment and Funding. This bill will incentivize more health care workers across the State by creating the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MLARP) for Nurses and Nursing Workers. This loan repayment will be for nurse and nursing workers who practice a medical specialty that has been identified as being in shortage in the geographic area of the State where the individual practices. This loan repayment will put more healthcare workers in the underserved areas of the state where they are needed most.

MLARP will encourage nurses to work in rural areas that need more healthcare resources. Rural Marylanders are often in worse health than that of their urban and suburban counterparts and lack access to the medical facilities and practitioners to improve their health. This is especially true in specialty areas, and mental and dental care. Additionally, rural areas are made up of aging populations that require more medical attention but lack the healthcare workforce to do so. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) reports that more than 1.1 million Marylanders are in a primary care Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). That's over 1.1 million Marylanders that lack access to the primary health care they need. In the U.S, rural or partially rural areas make up over 68% of the designated primary care HPSAs.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, from 2020 to 2030 nurse practitioner jobs will grow by 52% or almost 15,000 jobs, partially due to the growing demand of preventative care and the aging of the large baby boomer generation that will experience minor illnesses and complex conditions. Rural areas are already experiencing an aging population and less retention of younger workers to provide an appropriate workforce. In addition to having worse health conditions and access to medical care, this could lead the current issues being faced by rural communities to be exacerbated in the future.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 696.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"