

**SB 407 – Health Occupations – Health Care Staffing Shortage Emergency – Declaration and Licensing and Practice Requirements (Health Care Heroes Act of 2022)**

**Position: *Support***

February 9, 2022

Senate Finance Committee

**Bill Summary**

SB 407, an emergency bill, would authorize the Secretary of Health to declare a health care staffing shortage emergency when it impacts the ability of health care facilities to appropriately respond to the clinical needs of patients and the staffing shortage endangers the public health in the State. Each health occupations board must establish processes for the issuance of an initial health occupation license, a temporary health occupations license, and a temporary practice letter on an expedited basis during a health care staffing shortage emergency. On the declaration of a health care staffing shortage emergency, the Secretary may direct the health occupations boards to implement the expedited licensing processes.

**MedStar Health's Position**

SB 407 would provide a mechanism to allow the Maryland Secretary of Health to, in certain circumstances, declare a health care staffing emergency. Such a declaration would trigger the licensure flexibilities which are critical to hospitals' ability to care for Marylanders now and into the future. In January 2022, there were more new cases of COVID-19 than the previous 10 months combined. A spike in hospitalizations—2,603 COVID inpatients per day on average—strained hospitals and their already overburdened workforce. As a result, roughly a quarter of the state's hospitals (15) operated under crisis standards of care, indicating massive limits of resources and manpower. This situation developed very quickly and demonstrated the need for the government to respond in real-time.

Our hospital heroes have been there for Marylanders, serving for more than 700 days on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. We're coming out of what was perhaps the most harrowing month of this public health crisis since its earliest days. Workforce shortages are at crisis levels with a staggering 50 percent increase in hospital nurse vacancies in just five months. That means fewer caregivers at the bedside, limiting capacity to care for patients, including those with COVID-19 and other serious conditions. While most hospitals have been able to move from crisis to contingency standards as case rates dramatically declined, all hospitals are looking to the future and bracing for the next surge. That collision of a surge with our persistent staffing shortages could once again place hospitals in critical condition.

These heroes put caring for their communities first throughout this pandemic, and now they need relief afforded by the Health Care Heroes Act of 2022.

For the reasons listed above, we respectfully ask that you give SB 407 a ***favorable*** report.