



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

March 3, 2022

House Bill 1208: Health Occupations - Health Care Workforce Expansion

Written Testimony Only

POSITION: FAVORABLE

On behalf of the members of the Health Facilities Association of Maryland (HFAM), we appreciate the opportunity to express our support for House Bill 1208. 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.

House Bill 1208 establishes requirements for the State Board of Nursing related to the expansion of the workforce in nursing-related fields, establishes a State income tax credit for certain licensed practical nurses, nurse practitioners, and registered nurses. In addition, this legislation establishes the Licensed Practical Nurse and Registered Nurse Preceptorship Tax Credit Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund to offset the costs of the tax credit available for the preceptorship program.

The legislation will help attract more individuals to pursue careers in the field of nursing by promoting professions in nursing and making it easier for individuals interested in nursing to obtain information on licensure requirements, funding and financing options to pay for education and training, as well as information on accredited schools and training programs. In addition, this legislation will help to alleviate the current staffing crisis that healthcare settings across the continuum of care are facing through a variety of measures such as the creation of the preceptorship tax credit fund and the clinical extern provisions.

Relative to the long-term and post-acute care sector, this legislation will empower the Maryland Board of Nursing (MBON) to include provisions to allow an individual who has been practicing as a nursing assistant without certification by the Board to apply on-the-job experience as a nursing assistant toward the total number of training hours required for certification.

This is incredibly important because during the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government waived federal nursing assistant training and certification requirements. The federal government, through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), has authority over this process, but state approval is also required. Under this waiver, many states permitted an eight-hour online emergency temporary nursing assistant (TNA) course. The American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) created a free online course and continues to offer it for those wishing to become TNAs. Here in Maryland, 3,137 participants have successfully taken the 8-hour TNA training as of February 24, 2022.

Graduates of the course who demonstrate competency are allowed to work as TNAs in healthcare settings in Maryland as long as the national public health emergency (PHE) exists and for up to 120 days after the emergency ends. Under the current rules, those who have been working as TNAs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic will be required to start their training from scratch in order to continue working after the federal public health emergency. For those working in long-term care settings in Maryland, this means they will be required to satisfy all of the Geriatric Nursing Assistant (GNA) requirements including taking the full training program and pass the GNA certification examination.

We have been working with Karen Evans and MBON on a certification pathway that would take into consideration the experience of a TNA and allow them to sit for the state certification exam after attestation that their experience and on-the-job training during the pandemic has been sufficient.

Under the provisions of House Bill 1208, the Maryland Board of Nursing would be authorized to take this innovative approach and count on-the-job experience toward training hours. This will be incredibly important to retaining nursing assistants and growing our licensed healthcare workforce.

Maryland faces a historic and dramatic shortage of licensed healthcare professionals. The Board of Nursing reported that 40,000 individuals licensed by the Board did not renew their license in 2021. The most recent Omicron surge of COVID-19 proved to us yet again that there is no individual hospital, nursing home, or physician's office workforce – there is one singular healthcare workforce in Maryland. It is shorthanded, and we are all drawing upon it.

Workforce challenges such as recruitment and retention have long existed in healthcare, 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. Going forward, the length of this workforce crisis will be measured in years and not months. Together we must create pathways that ensure we have enough qualified healthcare professionals to continue caring for Marylanders in need.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report from the Committee on House Bill 1208.

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