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Testimony in Support of  
Senate Bill 626 - Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Alterations  
House Health and Government Operations Committee  
March 22, 2022

**The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 626 - Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Alterations.** This bill will clarify that part-time physicians and physician assistants are eligible for the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants (MLARP). MLARP is currently available to physicians, physician assistants, and medical residents in their last year of residency that are working in a federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area, Medically Underserved Area/Population (MUA/P), or in one of the States 18 rural counties. By clarifying that part time physicians and physician assistants are eligible, it will increase the number of healthcare workers in the areas they are needed most.

Rural Marylanders are often in worse health than that of their urban and suburban counterparts, and lack access to medical facilities and practitioners, especially specialty care. By allowing part time physicians and physician assistants to qualify for MLARP, it will encourage more physicians and physician assistants to work in the rural and other underserved areas of the State. 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.

It is important that the shortages of healthcare workers be addressed now before further complications arise. The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ *Occupational Outlook Handbook* reports that the need for physician assistants will increase by 31% between 2020 and 2030, and there will be about 12,200 openings annually. The need for health care services will increase due to the healthcare services needed to provide for an aging population and an increase in patients with chronic disease. 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 Committee recently gave the companion bill, House Bill 1464, a favorable report. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 626.

*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”