



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**SB 696 – Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment for Nurses and Nursing Workers –
Program Establishment and Funding
House Health and Government Operations Affairs Committee
March 29, 2022**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President**

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 696 – Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment for Nurses and Nursing Workers – Program Establishment and Funding. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

Health care, nationwide, is facing a staffing crisis as an increasing number of health care workers are leaving the profession and not enough workers are entering it to replace them. This crisis was building prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but has been put into overdrive with the tremendous stress and workload faced by health care workers over the last two years. Moreover, to become fully trained as a nurse or nursing worker requires training that can sometimes be prohibitively expensive for some people, either in up-front costs, or through student loan repayment programs. This can create a barrier to entry for a lot of workers, exacerbating this staffing crisis.

SB 696 creates a fund for loan assistance for nurses and nursing workers, allowing them to apply to obtain financial assistance for loans for required educational expenses. Additionally, to keep loan assistance focused on mitigating the staffing shortage, priority for funds would go to nurses and nursing workers practicing in a geographic area or medical specialty that the State has identified as having a shortage.

Politicians commonly talk about our “health care heroes” and are happy to extol the virtues of our nursing workers in speeches. With SB 696, we can live up to our own values and words by helping to defray the costs of obtaining the skills to do this work – and we can start to address the critical staffing shortages in our health care system.

We ask for a favorable report on SB 696.