



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 29, 2022

**SB 696 / HB 783
MARYLAND LOAN ASSISTANCE REPAYMENT PROGRAM FOR NURSES
& NURSING WORKERS ACT**

Good Afternoon Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present SB 696, the cross file of HB 783. SB696 was considered by both the Senate Education, Health and Environment Committee and the Senate Budget and Tax Committee and was amended. It passed the Senate 46 - 0.

Nationally, we are experiencing a short staffing crisis in healthcare. In order to properly serve the residents in Maryland in 2 years, we will need a 40 percent increase in healthcare workers from current levels. To meet that need, we have to recruit new workers and retain the workers we currently have. One barrier to entering the healthcare industry is the high cost of the required education including high tuition rates, licensing fees and other associated expenses necessary to enter the industry.

These expenses discourage many candidates from entering the industry in a time when healthcare worker shortages are occurring in record numbers, on both a statewide and national levels.

Depending on the field of nursing, nursing certification programs can cost thousands of dollars. Additionally, many nurses and nursing workers will often have to obtain numerous certifications and degrees to become fully certified.

Maryland's successful Total Cost of Care Model drives the need for a more-skilled workforce. In our hospitals, the nursing profession is rapidly changing to improve patient-centered care. Meanwhile hospitals are increasingly coordinating complex-care, such as skilled nursing and rehabilitation facilities for discharged patients.

How can Maryland address this need for highly skilled nurses and nursing workers?

SB696 establishes the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MLARP) to provide loan repayment, financial assistance to cover education loans, including tuition and related education expenses for state certifications, undergraduate and graduate academic programs to become registered nurses, certified nursing assistants, geriatric nursing assistants and others.

It requires the Maryland Department of Health to commence a workgroup to analyze how this or other programs can produce more nursing students to practice in marginalized areas. The final report is to include recommendations on an ongoing funding structure.

Upon recommendations from the workgroup, the General Assembly could implement a permanent funding source that could include any eligible federal or state funds.

The Department shall prioritize applicants who work in nursing fields where the staffing shortages can be prioritized by region or specialty. To apply for this assistance, an applicant must be employed through an eligible employer, including the state or local government, private, public, and other entities that employ nurses or nursing workers.

As the needs of our state's nursing workforce continue to increase, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 696.