



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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SB 518 – Career Pathways for Health Care Workers Program House Health and Government Operations Committee March 31, 2022

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards

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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 518 – Career Pathways for Health Care Workers Program. 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 is changing, rapidly, and Maryland is facing a health care staffing crisis. Prior to the pandemic, it was estimated that Maryland will be one of four states that will experience a shortage of over 10,000 nurses by 2025¹. This chronic retention problem has become acute with the COVID-19 pandemic, as stressed out and overburdened health care workers are choosing to leave the profession in higher numbers.

SB 518 provides some relief for existing health care workers, and inducements for those who are thinking of entering the field. The bill creates a fund for employers to apply matching grants to pay for training programs that help offset the costs for the existing workforce to acquire new skills. It places workers directly into training programs offered through Maryland's colleges, universities, and community colleges, and creates a career pathway program for workers to build the skills they need to be successful.

By the nature of the ever-changing nature of health care, these workers need constant and consistent training, certification, and licensure. Reducing the stress and cost of staying up-to-date and highly skilled will not only benefit the workers but will also mitigate the "brain drain" we are experiencing with the high attrition rate within the health care industry.

We ask for a favorable report on SB 518.

¹ USM Health Care Workforce Working Group – Strengthening Maryland's Health Care Workforce, 2018