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**SB 696 – Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment for Nurses and
Nursing Workers – Program Establishment and Funding**

Position: *Support*

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House Health and Government Operations Committee

Bill Summary

SB 696 establishes the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program Fund for Nurses and Nursing Workers to assist nurses and nursing workers with the repayment of education loans.

MedStar Health's Position

Across the country, hospitals desperate for nurses, especially in acute care, are trying to address intense burnout among health care workers and accelerated nurse retirements by hiring new graduates. They're offering jobs to students even before they graduate, and in many cases offering bonuses and other financial incentives.

One of the biggest bottlenecks in the system is long-standing — there are not enough people who teach nursing. Educators in the field are required to have advanced degrees yet typically earn about half that of a nurse working the floor of a hospital. In addition to a lack of faculty, the situation is compounded by an aging demographic. With so many nurses in their late 50s and 60s, the country's nursing pool is continuing to decline, to about two-thirds what it was five years ago.

Nurses are a critical part of healthcare system and make up the largest section of the health workforce. Nurses are often described as serving on the front lines of health care — the first to notice when a patient's condition has changed or to spring into action in a critical situation. We also know that being a nurse can be an incredibly rewarding profession, but the required education can be costly. Latest figures from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) show that nearly 70 percent of nurses take out student loans to finance their education, with a median student loan debt of \$40,000 to \$54,999. To help mitigate the burden of student loan debt, student loan forgiveness programs for nurses offer financial assistance in exchange for work commitments.

According to The American Nurses Association (ANA), more registered nurse jobs will be available through 2022 than any other profession in the United States. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 11 million additional nurses are needed to avoid a further shortage. Employment opportunities for nurses are projected to grow at a faster rate (15 percent) than all other occupations from 2016 through 2026.

A strong health care workforce is an absolute necessity to providing optimal health care access to all Marylanders. A program or educational loan repayment for health care providers is an effective tool for healthcare workforce development.

For the reasons listed above, we respectfully ask that you give SB 696 a ***favorable*** report.