



Maryland
Hospital Association

Senate Bill 626 - Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants - Alterations

Position: *Support*

February 17, 2022

Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

MHA Position

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 626.

The Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants (MLARP) is a powerful tool to retain and recruit primary care professionals—expanding access to care in underserved and rural areas. In exchange for loan repayment, physicians and physician assistants commit to practice in health professional shortage areas and/or areas identified by the state for at least two years. During the 2020 legislative session, the General Assembly expanded this program by passing [SB 501](#), which invested at least \$1 million in funding over the past three fiscal years—allowing the maximum federal match.

The legislation also established a [stakeholder work group](#) staffed by the Office of Population Health Improvement. The group released a [final report](#) with recommendations to diversify the program's funding to include a permanent general fund appropriation and supplemental non-general funds. SB 626 codifies many of the work group recommendations, including expanding eligibility to include physicians and physician assistants working part time and to establish a permanent advisory council to ensure the program's stability and guide its expansion.

Investment in this program increases access to care. Physicians and physician assistants with fiscal year 2022 obligations provided more than 60,000 hours of service this year—more than 48,000 direct patient care hours. These caregivers served approximately 94,250 patients in Maryland.¹ MHA applauds the continued support for the program in the FY 2023 budget proposal.

We ask the state to invest in our health care workforce, which is facing historic staffing shortages. By doing so, we also invest in the health of all Marylanders.

For these reasons, we ask for a *favorable* report on SB 626.

For more information, please contact:
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¹ Maryland Loan Assistant Repayment Program (MLARP) for Physicians and Physician Assistants Workgroup. (Nov. 12, 2021). [Minutes](#).