



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

March 29, 2022

Senate Bill 696: Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment for Nurses and Nursing Workers –
Program Establishment and Funding
Written Testimony Only

POSITION: FAVORABLE

On behalf of the members of the Health Facilities Association of Maryland (HFAM), we appreciate the opportunity to express our support for Senate Bill 696. HFAM represents over 170 skilled nursing centers and assisted living communities in Maryland, as well as nearly 80 associate businesses that offer products and services to healthcare providers. Our members provide services and employ individuals in nearly every jurisdiction of the state

Senate Bill 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 and requires the Comptroller to distribute a certain amount of money of certain fees received by the State Board of Nursing to make grants for the Program.

We appreciate the intent of this legislation and agree that we should do all we can to support our health care workforce across all settings. We are especially appreciative that geriatric nursing assistants, certified nursing assistants, certified medicine aides, and certified medication technicians are all included as a “nursing worker” in this legislation.

Student loan debt owed by nurses and nursing assistants is not only a problem for the individual, but for the entire health care system. Baccalaureate degrees and other education costs for nurses and nursing assistants are a heavy burden. This is not only the case for initial degrees, but such costs hamper nursing career ladder advancements tied to education.

The financial assistance proposed by Senate Bill 696 will help increase the number of nurses and nursing assistants working in Maryland, make working in nursing more attractive to potential employees, and decrease staff turnover. This is now more important than ever as we are currently facing a health care workforce crisis in Maryland.

Workforce challenges such as recruitment and retention have long existed in health care, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have only grown worse over the last two years and they will likely remain even as we begin to navigate a post-pandemic world.

There is currently an extreme shortage of health care workers in a range of roles and particularly among nurses and nursing assistants. In 2021 the Maryland Board of Nursing reported that 40,000 licensed individuals in Maryland had chosen not to renew their professional license.

Nurses and nursing assistants are truly the backbone of health care centers and this is especially true in long-term and post-acute care settings. Geriatric nursing assistants (GNAs) keep skilled nursing and rehabilitation centers running smoothly and keep residents and patients engaged, comfortable, and happy. They are extremely essential to not only long-term care, but to the entire care continuum.

Throughout the pandemic, nurses and nursing assistants have proven themselves to be not just essential workers, but health care heroes. There are so many amazing stories of dedication, sacrifice, and compassion by these health care professionals who have gone above and beyond to ensure the safety, health, and happiness of residents and patients during these unprecedented times.

Considering the workforce challenges that our sector and many others face, it is more important than ever that we continue to support our nurses and nursing assistants. As we plan our long-term “new normal” in health care, we must be intentional about creating quality health care jobs and growing careers. We are placing consideration attention on how education, on-the-job training, and experience can overlap and create incentives to produce more licensed health care professionals.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report from the Committee on Senate Bill 696.

Submitted by:

Joseph DeMattos, Jr.

President and CEO

(410) 290-5132