



Maryland
Hospital Association

January 31, 2023

To: The Honorable Benjamin Barnes, Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 186 - Victim Services Programs - Supplementing Federal Funding and Support (Victim Services Stabilization Act)

Dear Chair Barnes:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 186.

Across the state, hospital-based sexual assault forensic exam ([SAFE](#)) programs employ forensic nurse examiners. These registered nurses receive special training in evidence collection and are experts in delivering trauma-informed care to survivors of violence and abuse. State law ensures survivors of sexual assault have access to emergency medical treatment for injuries sustained as a result of the assault with no out-of-pocket expenses.

However, this reimbursement does not cover the full cost of care. These exams can take hours to complete and move at the survivor's pace. There is also no reimbursement for care rendered to survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, and other forms of violence. Many hospitals absorb these costs as part of their mission. As a result, many hospital-based programs are sustained through grant funding, including the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants, administered by the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services.

Often VOCA funding goes to support staff salaries for forensic nurse examiners and pediatric child abuse physicians. Maryland hospitals are facing the most critical staffing shortage in recent memory. A 2022 [GlobalData](#) report estimates a statewide shortage of 5,000 full-time registered nurses and 4,000 licensed practical nurses. Without intervention, shortages could double or even triple by 2035. The forensic nursing workforce is a subset of the registered nursing workforce and unfortunately, has also been impacted. Lack of resources and staff have forced programs to reduce hours, utilize on-call nurses and rely on hospitals in neighboring counties to lend support and coverage.

Having adequate funding is critical to ensure hospitals can provide 24/7 coverage and meet the needs of survivors across the state.

For these reasons, we ask for a *favorable* report on HB 186.

For more information, please contact:

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