



AFT Healthcare-Maryland
7127 Rutherford Road
Baltimore, MD 21244

Local 5197

Committee: Appropriations
Bill: House Bill 559

Written Testimony Submitted for the Record

Date: February 27, 2024
Position - Support

Good afternoon Chairman and members of the Appropriations Committee

I am Rosemary Wertz, Field Coordinator for AFT Healthcare-Maryland, the exclusive bargaining representative for Healthcare Professionals in Maryland State government. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 559. Our bargaining unit includes Registered Nurses, Physicians, Therapists and Counselors. The vacancy and turnover rate for classifications in our bargaining unit have increased over the last few years. In an effort to attract and retain Registered Nurses, we negotiated a 36 hour workweek program for our Registered Nurses in 24/7 facilities in 2019. The Western Maryland Hospital Center and the Thomas B. Finan Center initially posted vacancy announcements for Registered Nurses for both 12 and 8 hour shifts. Twelve hour shift announcements received more than twice the response. New language included in our MOU effective January 1, 2024 includes a commitment from management to expand the 36 hour workweek for nurses, in part, due to the positive impact on recruitment.

Prior to executive order 01.01.1991.19, full time state employees had a choice of shifts. Some worked 40 hours per week, while others worked 35 or 37 and ½ hours. Alternative shifts were offered in lieu of pay raises when the budget was tight. We currently have members working the 36 hour workweek and we have requests for expansion of the program from our nurses. We also have members working four 10 hour shifts, and some working a combination 8 and 12 hour shifts.

While other state employees were on administrative leave for months, our members were required to rapidly adjust to additional duties during COVID. We had a group of Community Health Nurses in Charles County Schools performing COVID testing in VEIP stations. Our members in the 24/7 hospitals were working crazy amounts of overtime during COVID surges. The additional stress has increased burnout and negatively impacted retention. Registered Nurses in private hospitals starting working 12 hour shifts in the 1970's to combat the nursing shortage. We are still trying to expand the program to the rest of the hospitals in MDH today.

Recruitment and retention of employees is becoming more and more about work/life balance. The Department of Budget and Management's website includes information about "good work life balance" on the page advertising positions. We support all efforts to offer shift options to employees that fit their lives. State government must be able to compete in the marketplace for employees. Establishment of the 36 hour workweek for nurses came almost 50 years after private industry. AFT Healthcare-Maryland supports HB 559 and urges a favorable vote from this committee.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary L. Wertz, Field Coordinator, AFT Healthcare-Maryland, 443-370-0706, rwertz@afthcmd.org