

2/12/24

Re: Proposed solutions to address the Maryland healthcare workforce shortages

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Kathy Ware, I am a nurse practitioner licensed and certified in Maryland. I am a member of the Nurse Practitioner Association of Maryland (NPAM). The following are some solutions to the nursing workforce shortages we proposed in a letter to the House and Senate committees last session (2023). **I would like to remind you of these ideas this session as well.**

Please also refer to my written testimony in opposition to SB 359: Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Compact.

Background

Nurse Practitioners (NPs) are Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) who have advanced education, and are nationally certified and licensed to provide healthcare to patients. NPs are held to high legal and ethical standards of care and are committed to providing personalized, high-quality health care. NPs are dedicated to bridging gaps in healthcare to better meet the needs of our population.

Nurse practitioners make up the vast majority of APRNs in Maryland and are by far the largest group affected by this Compact. Most NPs practice in primary care; there are more adult and family NPs than other specialties; many NPs work in rural areas where there are shortages of primary care physicians; NPs are opening up solo practices in rural areas. According to data collected in 2022 by the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), 83.2% of full-time NPs are seeing Medicare patients and 81.9% are seeing Medicaid patients. 1

Respectfully, here are some of the actionable alternatives to enhance the nursing workforce in Maryland without the negative impacts the Compact (SB 359) would have on NPs' ability to care for Marylanders.

Work to improve efficiency of Maryland Board of Nursing processes to grant and renew licenses and certifications for all nurses, especially now that it is under the control of MDH

- Create streamlined processes for APRN license reciprocity between states/ licensure by endorsement **(there is a reciprocity bill this session SB 221/ HB 146 that could be very helpful)**
- Issue temporary/interim licenses for applicants during the licensing process

- Recruit and hire talented professionals to fill the over 30 vacancies
- Hire temporary personnel to fill the personnel gaps in the interim
- Fast track implementation of the new computer technology system
- Require staff to work on-site
- Provide criminal background check services on site
- Update the antiquated phone system
- Provide licensees the opportunity to problem solve via telephone by hiring receptionists so that phone calls are answered timely
- Improve the quality of the audio for constituents and interested parties calling in to hear the open Board meetings
- Partner with schools of nursing and nursing faculty to provide support for new licensees as they go through the license and certification process

Enhance the nursing workforce in Maryland

- Mandate nurse-patient ratios in acute care settings
- Increase funding for nurse residency programs to increase retention of new grads
- Work with the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) to decrease demand that Associate Degree RNs start a BSN program within three months of hire (this can lead to burnout during the new nurse transition period and becomes a retention issue)
- Pass legislation preventing criminalization of medical errors
- Provide financial incentives for continuing education to those who wish to pursue a career in nursing education
- Provide low interest business loans, educational loan repayment, and other financial incentives to increase NP owned practices in rural and underserved areas

Maximize access to care for all Marylanders

- Increase broadband infrastructure across the state
- Ease restrictions on use and reimbursement for audio only telehealth visits

Improve access to Mental Health Services

- Provide for tuition payment for RNs and APRNs wishing to obtain a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) degree
- Ease restrictions on audio only telehealth visits

Provide revised/new language for APRN Compact legislation that would address workforce issues while avoiding detrimental impacts on NPs' ability to care for Marylanders that potentially could be introduced next session.

- NPAM has offered to draft the language and present to NCSBN for review and discussion. They have refused.

Again, I am OPPOSED SB 359- Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Compact.

I appreciate your time and consideration, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

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Nurse practitioner

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1. 2022 AANP National Nurse Practitioner Workforce Survey - Preliminary Analysis. www.aanp.org/about/all-about-nps/np-fact-sheet. Accessed December 29, 2022.