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Executive Nominations Committee

**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

**February 20, 2024**

**The Senate Finance Committee**

**SB 167 – Physician Assistants – Revisions (Physician Assistant Modernization  
Act of 2024)**

**Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza**

Thank you Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the distinguished Senate Finance Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 167, the Physician Assistant Modernization Act of 2024, and to respectfully ask for your support of this bill which would modernize the law regarding the working relationship between Physicians and Physician Assistants to better reflect current practice and to improve access to quality health care.

For the past three years, I have been working with physicians assistants and physicians from across the State on passage of legislation that would provide improved access to quality care to Marylanders, especially in the context of the existing healthcare shortage, and particularly in rural areas like my district which includes Worcester County from the Delaware line to the Virginia line, more than half of Wicomico County with the largest number of agriculture sales in the State, and all of Somerset County, including Smith Island, where you need a boat to serve the residents.

Physician workforce shortages challenge the long-term viability of a strong medical network and the ability to achieve the goals of improving the quality of care, improving health of populations, and reducing per capita health care costs. The United States is facing a projected workforce shortage of between 37,800 and 124,000 physicians. Overall, Maryland is 16 percent below the national average for number of physicians available for clinical practice, and that will become worse over time. Maryland hospitals are already struggling to maintain adequate coverage in the emergency room and to support many of the medical specialties, especially in Southern Maryland, Western Maryland, and on the Eastern Shore.

This workforce shortage is similar to the workforce shortage that created the Physician Assistant profession in the 1960s when the first class of PAs graduated from the Duke University Medical Center in 1967. It can take up to a decade to properly educate and train a physician, whereas most graduate-level Physician Assistant programs are completed within three years. We need to take action now to ensure our caregivers can meet our needs. Medicine is now a team sport, and

we need to build and train a strong supportive structure that better utilizes our Physician Assistants.

The Physician Assistant Modernization Act would enable Physician Assistants to work collaboratively with the medical team and make contributions that they are currently restricted from doing. SB 167 would change the “Delegation Agreement” to a “Collaborative Agreement,” which is consistent with the education and expanded role the PAs have taken on due to limited staffing and the COVID-19 pandemic. While scope of practice has been expanded, there are guardrails in place – education, requirements, licensing, collaboration, and identified out of scope practices.

In the course of working on this legislation for the past three years, the need for this legislation, for access to quality health care, has only increased, especially in our rural areas. When I talk to practicing physician assistants and future physician assistants in my District, they have trained and are training to be a crucial part of Maryland’s health care solution when it comes to increasing access. In some areas, many patients rely on PAs as their primary healthcare providers, and with Senate Bill 167, we can enhance the healthcare delivery system and ensure that patients receive the quality care they need across Maryland.

I thank you for your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 167.