

TO: The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Chair
Members, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Terri A. Hill

FROM: Sonny Goel, M.D.

DATE: March 28, 2024

RE: **SUPPORT** for House Bill 1388 – Labor and Employment – Noncompete and Conflict of Interest Clauses – Veterinary and Health Care Professionals

Thank you for considering this letter in support of HB 1388, sponsored by Delegate Dr. Hill.

Restrictive covenants for physicians are jeopardizing patient care in Maryland. Not only are patients losing access to skilled doctors and surgeons, but these clauses are also adding pressure to a system suffering from a shortage of physicians. The surrounding states are more than happy to welcome our doctors and surgeons who are being forced out of Maryland, uprooting their children from their schools and abandoning Maryland patients. I have a friend who had to relocate her whole family to California because of her restrictive covenant – where such covenants are outlawed.

As one of the most experienced LASIK surgeons in Maryland, I was sued by my former employer when I quit due to unsafe patient care initiatives in the quest for greater profits. I successfully defended myself over a prolonged 16-month legal battle which cost me over \$300k and still causes me PTSD 4 years later. During this period, local citizens did not have full access to my ability to provide experienced ophthalmology care.

Recently an anesthesia company was kicked out of a local hospital because they could not adequately staff surgeries. As the hospital tried to regroup and restart offering surgical services, this same anesthesia company sued any former employees who tried to work for this hospital. Patients suffered due to canceled procedures. The hospital suffered and came under extreme financial strain.

Two days ago, NBC News reported the prevalence of non-competes has increased as more doctors are employed by hospitals or private equity groups. The American Medical Association and American College of Surgeons say the agreements can contribute to doctor shortages, cut doctor-patient relationships, and scare doctors from speaking out about unsafe practices for fear of being fired and unable to work locally due to the restriction. This will force doctors to move elsewhere.

I am not here for myself. My time of being caught in the vortex of a restrictive covenant is behind me, thank goodness. Instead, I am here to advocate for my colleagues who have gone through extensive training to provide expert and compassionate care to their patients. Trapping them in non-competes with stressful working conditions increases physician burn-out and forces doctors to leave Maryland and abandon their patients.

For the good of our healthcare workforce and for all Maryland patients, please support HB 1388. Thank you for your time.