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Maryland Must Take Steps To Address Excessive ER Wait Times

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 720

Given before the Senate Finance Committee

A well-staffed healthcare system benefits Maryland's economy by reducing healthcare costs associated with prolonged hospital stays and preventable medical complications. SB 720 is a crucial step toward improving healthcare access, ensuring patient safety, and addressing workforce shortages that negatively impact both healthcare providers and patients in Maryland. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy urges this committee to support SB 720 because when healthcare workers are supported, patient outcomes improve, and hospitals function more efficiently.**

Maryland currently has the longest emergency room wait times in the nation, with patients experiencing delays that lead to unnecessary deaths, worsening of health conditions, and increased strain on families. The adverse consequences of prolonged ER wait times have been well-documented by numerous studies and professional health organizations, including the American Medical Association. Furthermore, many Maryland hospitals have not received acceptable safety grades, highlighting the urgent need for systemic improvements.

One of the primary causes of these excessive wait times is inadequate hospital staffing at all levels, including physicians, nurses, physician assistants, social workers, pharmacists, transporters, housekeeping, and emergency medical services. The lack of sufficient staff contributes to moral distress, burnout, and high turnover rates, further exacerbating hospital operational inefficiencies.

SB 720 seeks to define, increase, and improve staffing levels in Maryland's hospitals, ensuring that healthcare professionals can provide timely and quality care. This aligns with the Maryland Center on Economic Policy's support for policies that reduce economic and health disparities. Addressing workforce shortages and improving hospital staffing will create a more equitable healthcare system, ensuring that all Marylanders, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to timely and effective medical care.

From an equity perspective, low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately affected by long ER wait times and hospital safety concerns. This legislation is a necessary step toward addressing these disparities, promoting health equity, and improving outcomes for all residents.

A well-staffed healthcare system benefits Maryland's economy by reducing healthcare costs associated with prolonged hospital stays and preventable medical complications. When healthcare workers are supported, patient outcomes improve, and hospitals function more efficiently. SB 720 is a step towards addressing Maryland's hospital workforce shortages, improving patient safety, and promoting a healthier and more equitable state for all

residents. For these reasons, **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy urges a favorable report on SB 720.**

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 720

Bill Summary

SB 720 is a crucial step toward improving healthcare access, ensuring patient safety, and addressing workforce shortages that negatively impact both healthcare providers and patients in Maryland.

Background

Maryland currently has the longest emergency room wait times in the nation, with patients experiencing delays that lead to unnecessary deaths, worsening of health conditions, and increased strain on families. The adverse consequences of prolonged ER wait times have been well-documented by numerous studies and professional health organizations. Furthermore, many Maryland hospitals have not received acceptable safety grades, highlighting the urgent need for systemic improvements.

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Equity Implications

From an equity perspective, low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately affected by long ER wait times and hospital safety concerns. This legislation is a necessary step toward addressing these disparities, promoting health equity, and improving outcomes for all residents.

Impact

Senate Bill 720 will likely **improve racial, health and economic equity** in Maryland.