



**Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)**

To the House Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

January 21, 2025

House Bill 19- Health Occupations- Nursing- Loan Repayment, Education, and Sunset Extension  
(Building Opportunities for Nurses Act of 2025)

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 19, the Health Occupations- Nursing- Loan Repayment, Education, and Sunset Extension (Building Opportunities for Nurses Act of 2025).

MRHA supports this legislation that would extend funding for nursing programs, expand the eligibility criteria, and incentivize additional repayment options to nurses and nursing support staff who opt for working in a geographic location experiencing health care workforce shortages.

In 2022, the Maryland General Assembly enacted legislation creating a new entity, the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis, with the primary priority to address the growing shortage, find short term solutions, and address future needs (“Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis,” 2023).

The findings reported the state of Maryland’s health care workforce to be in a worse position than neighboring states, at a rate of 4.6% versus 5.8%, and far below the national average of 11.5% (“Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis,” 2023). These shortages were additionally reported to be substantial in rural parts of the state of Maryland, with “76 primary care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)” (“Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis,” 2023).

A top legislative priority for MRHA this year is to support initiatives that would address these ever-growing shortages of the rural health care workforce by improving recruitment and retention in rural areas.

MRHA believes extending the loan repayment funds available and expanding the “eligible field of employment” to include areas experiencing a critical shortage would be vital in addressing Maryland’s rural community needs. We strongly advocate for your support of this amendment.

Sincerely,

On Behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association, Alexis Garcia, Legislative and Policy Intern

Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis: Final Report 2022/2023. (2023). In *health.maryland.gov*. [https://health.maryland.gov/docs/SB%20440%20Ch.%20708%20\(2022\)%20%E2%80%93%202023%20Final%20Report%20%E2%80%93%20Commission%20to%20Study%20the%20Heal.pdf](https://health.maryland.gov/docs/SB%20440%20Ch.%20708%20(2022)%20%E2%80%93%202023%20Final%20Report%20%E2%80%93%20Commission%20to%20Study%20the%20Heal.pdf)