



Local 5197

AFT Healthcare-Maryland

7127 Rutherford Road
Baltimore, MD 21244

Written Testimony Submitted for the Record

Committee: Appropriations

Bill: House Bill 1248

Date: March 3, 2026

Position - Support

Good afternoon Chairman and members of the Appropriations Committee

I am Rosemary Wertz, Field Coordinator for AFT Healthcare-Maryland, the exclusive bargaining representative for Healthcare Professionals in Maryland State government. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support HB 1248. Our bargaining unit includes Registered Nurses, Physicians, Therapists and Counselors. We negotiated a 36-hour workweek program for our Registered Nurses in 24/7 facilities in 2019 and came here to the legislature to have the law amended to allow full time salary and benefits for members of the program. Currently we have members working 3 twelve hour shifts and 4 ten hour shifts. We have been attempting to expand shift options for healthcare professionals in state government for many years to address recruitment and retention.

The Maryland Department of Health had a 12.31% vacancy rate, with 549.6 vacancies in the personnel detail in this year's budget submission. I want to stress the impact of high vacancy rates on safety in 24/7 facilities. Every year this committee and others raise concerns regarding the overtime cost in these facilities. I want to be clear, this is a staffing problem. There are facilities that post a schedule with shifts that are filled by overtime. Think about that for a minute. This means that there are not enough employees to fill all shifts necessary to run some facilities without overtime. While you look at the fiscal impact of overtime in a facility, we see the personal impact. The work environment has changed due to the change in the patient population. Patients are committed to these facilities by the courts. There are no voluntary admissions anymore. This has resulted in healthcare professionals working with individuals who have been in correctional facilities. These patients bring criminal behaviors into these facilities. Our members are verbally assaulted on a daily basis. Then there are the occasions of physical assault, which also occurs somewhere in the hospital system on a daily basis. Being ordered to work a 16 hour shift in that environment causes retention problems. Our 36 hour workweek RNs report a higher level of satisfaction with their jobs, because they are able to have more time away from work to decompress from the high stress environment. The state must expand the tools used for recruitment to become competitive in the labor market for healthcare professionals. Shift options are another tool that has already been successfully implemented in some facilities.

Recruitment and retention of employees is becoming more and more about work/life balance. AFT Healthcare-Maryland supports HB 1248 and urges a favorable vote from this committee.

Respectfully submitted,
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