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*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

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Testimony in Support of  
Senate Bill 489 - Health Occupations - Physicians Trained in International Medical Schools  
Finance Committee  
February 17, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council **supports Senate Bill 489 - Health Occupations - Physicians Trained in International Medical Schools**. Senate Bill 489 updates Maryland's physician licensure framework to better recognize the qualifications of physicians who completed their medical education outside the United States. The bill allows the State Board of Physicians to consider accredited postgraduate medical training as an alternative pathway to licensure and requires newly licensed internationally trained physicians to practice under supervision during their initial licensure period. These changes would take effect on October 1, 2026.

Maryland continues to face significant challenges in ensuring adequate access to health care, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Many residents in these areas experience long wait times for appointments, limited access to primary and behavioral health services, and difficulty retaining providers. These challenges have intensified in recent years as workforce shortages, provider burnout, and population aging place additional strain on an already stretched healthcare system.

Federal workforce data illustrates the scope of the problem. As of December 31, 2025, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) reported that Maryland continues to have extensive areas designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas. According to HRSA estimates, the state would need approximately 284 additional primary care practitioners to eliminate primary care shortage designations and about 81 additional mental health providers to address all mental health shortage areas. These shortages are particularly acute in rural regions, where access to consistent care is often limited.

Internationally trained physicians represent a highly skilled and underutilized workforce that can help address these gaps. Senate Bill 489 offers a balanced approach by reducing unnecessary licensure barriers while maintaining patient safety through supervised practice requirements. By enabling qualified physicians to enter the workforce more efficiently, the bill supports healthcare delivery in communities that have historically struggled to recruit and retain providers.

By modernizing licensure standards and expanding the physician pipeline, Senate Bill 489 strengthens Maryland's healthcare system, supports overburdened providers, and improves access to care for patients across the state.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 489.