



50 Harry S. Truman Parkway • Annapolis, MD 21401
Office: 410-841-5772 • Fax: 410-841-5987 • TTY: 800-735-2258
Email: rmc.mda@maryland.gov
Website: www.rural.maryland.gov

Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of
House Bill 598 - Physicians - Licensing - Internationally Trained Physicians
Health Committee
February 18, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council **supports House Bill 598 - Physicians - Licensing - Internationally Trained Physicians**. This bill authorizes the State Board of Physicians to issue a medical practice license to internationally trained physicians starting October 1, 2028, under certain conditions. It also requires the Board to establish regulations that outline the minimum qualifications and application fees for licensure, as well as to create a pathway to full licensure.

Rural Marylanders are often in worse health than their urban and suburban counterparts and lack access to medical facilities and practitioners to improve their health. This is especially true in specialty areas such as mental health and dental care. Additionally, rural areas are made up of aging populations that require more medical attention but lack the healthcare workforce to do so. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) reports that more than 1.1 million Marylanders are in a primary care Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). That's over 1.1 million Marylanders who lack access to the primary health care they need. In the U.S., rural or partially rural areas make up over 68% of the designated primary care HPSAs.

As of December 31, 2025, federal data from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) show that Maryland continues to face shortages in health care providers in federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs). To eliminate primary care HPSA designations in the state, Maryland would need approximately 284 additional primary care practitioners. For mental health care HPSA designations, HRSA estimates the state would need about 81 additional mental health practitioners to remove all shortage designations. Internationally trained physicians could potentially help address these shortages by providing primary care and mental health services in designated HPSAs, particularly in rural areas of Maryland.

House Bill 598 will allow more high-level healthcare workers to practice in Maryland, where there are shortages or where physicians are needed. While certain areas of the State have been facing a shortage of healthcare workers, it was worsened by the pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, members of the healthcare workforce are leaving at higher rates, mostly from the increased workload and amount of stress that they have been facing. As some healthcare workers quit, it creates more of a workload and stress for the remaining members, resulting in a cycle of burnout. This will allow workers to adequately perform their jobs and ensure that patients are getting the treatment that they need.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 598.