

*Advancing the interests of physicians and patients in Prince George's County.*

House Health Committee

March 17, 2026

House Bill 1617 *Health Innovation Zones*

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Prince George's County Medical Society represents more than 500 physicians dedicated to protecting and advancing the interests of physicians and patients in Prince George's County. We support House Bill 1617 Health Innovation Zones.

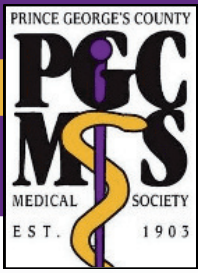
Prince George's County faces a significant shortage of physicians and health care resources, which directly affects access to care. Our county has fewer physicians per capita than many other jurisdictions in Maryland, and many communities lack adequate access to primary care physicians, specialists, pharmacies, and healthy food options. These access gaps contribute to serious health disparities, including challenges surrounding maternal health and chronic disease.

Access to care begins with access to physicians, and Prince George's County simply does not have enough.

This workforce shortage is part of a growing national physician shortage. The United States could see a shortage of between 37,800 and 124,000 physicians by 2034. While an aging population increases demand for care the physician workforce is also aging—nearly 40% of physicians will be age 65 or older by 2031.

Physicians are facing increasing professional and financial pressures. Maryland's physician payment rates are among the lowest in the nation, while administrative burdens such as prior authorization requirements and payment disputes with insurers consume significant time and resources that could otherwise be spent caring for patients. The average medical school graduate also enters the workforce with more than \$240,000 in student loan debt, making decisions about where to practice and what specialty to choose even more challenging.

Maryland has already taken important steps to improve care delivery through innovative programs such as the Maryland Primary Care Program (MDPCP) and the Episode Quality Improvement Program (EQIP), which not only support coordinated care and improved patient outcomes, but also improve the financial viability of independent practices. There is other legislation before you to address issues surrounding payment from private carriers and administrative burdens, and the FY 2027 budget continues to level-fund Medicaid payments.



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HB 1617 has the potential to be another important tool to address the physician shortage in Prince George's County. By authorizing the designation of Health Innovation Zones in Prince George's County and enabling the county to establish incentives that attract physicians, as well as pharmacies and grocery stores, to underserved communities, this bill can strengthen the local health care infrastructure and expand access to care where it is needed most.

For these reasons, the Prince George's County Medical Society respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 1617.