



Maryland
Hospital Association

**Senate Bill 407 - Health Occupations - Health Care Staffing Shortage Emergency -
Declaration and Licensing and Practice Requirements (Health Care Heroes Act of 2022)**

Position: *Support*

February 9, 2022

Senate Finance Committee

MHA Position

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 407, the Health Care Heroes Act of 2022.

Our hospital heroes have been there for Marylanders, serving more than 700 days on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. We're coming out of what was perhaps the most harrowing month of this public health crisis since its earliest days.

In January, there were more new cases of COVID-19 than in the previous 10 months combined. A spike in hospitalizations—2,603 COVID inpatients per day on average—pushed hospitals and their already overburdened workforces beyond limits. As a result, 15 hospitals, one-third of the state's acute care hospitals, were compelled to operate under crisis standards of care.

Workforce shortages are at crisis levels with a staggering 50% jump in hospital nurse vacancies in just five months. That means fewer caregivers at the bedside, limiting capacity to care for patients, both those with COVID-19 and those having other serious conditions such as cancer.

At the moment, the so-called Omicron wave is subsiding. Most hospitals that adopted crisis standards of care have moved to contingency standards of care. But this surge—the fifth since the pandemic began two years ago—will not be the last. Hospitals are bracing for the next one.

The collision of another surge with our persistent staffing shortages could once again place hospitals in critical condition. That will threaten the health of all Marylanders. It need not be so.

SB 407 will provide a way for the Maryland health secretary to declare a health care staffing emergency in certain circumstances. Such a declaration would trigger the licensure flexibilities that are crucial to hospitals' ability to care for Marylanders. During earlier surges, similar provisions freed thousands of practitioners—from nursing students to those who live in other states or had expired or soon-to-expire licenses—to step up in our hospitals, nursing homes and clinics. It was a lifeline.

These Maryland heroes have put caring for their neighbors first throughout this pandemic. Now they need relief afforded by the Health Care Heroes Act of 2022. We urge a favorable report.

For more information, please contact:

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