

TO: The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chair
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

FROM: Elizabeth A. Hafey
Assistant Director, State Affairs
John Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Medicine

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Johns Hopkins supports **Senate Bill 501 Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding**. SB 501 will improve the efficiency of the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants (Program) and enhance Maryland's ability to respond to a growing demand for primary care physicians in underserved and rural areas. This bill seeks to restore the funding to, at least, the fiscal year 2016 level of \$750,000.

Loan repayment is an immensely effective recruitment and retention tool for primary care physicians. Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine makes every attempt to minimize tuition costs for medical students. Nevertheless, most medical students graduate with substantial debt, and subsequently face additional years of training and mounting expenses. Loan forgiveness programs have proven to attract physicians to shortage areas and to specialties that are in short supply, such as primary care. Otherwise, many physicians will continue to choose higher paying specialties. Johns Hopkins strongly supports efforts to employ this strategy in order to meaningfully and quickly begin to have an impact on the physician workforce shortages affecting Maryland citizens.

Maintaining or bolstering the debt reduction options for physicians will encourage physicians to enter primary care. Over the years, primary care physician (family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, geriatrics, emergency medicine, and psychiatry) shortages have worsened, and will only continue to deteriorate. The national primary care physician shortage causes all health systems, including Johns Hopkins, to have continual vacancy rates that is usually five to ten percent. Consequently, these issues disproportionately affect medically underserved areas. For example, at least seven of Johns Hopkins Community Physician (JHCP)'s sites have the designation as a Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Area and/or is medically underserved area. Those sites include East Baltimore Medical Center, Canton, Johns Hopkins Bayview, Remington, Brandywine, Westminster, and Greater Dundalk. Recruitment can be very challenging at these sites. Sometimes, filling these vacancies may take up to two years.

Furthermore, this primary care shortage disrupts access to patient care, affects the quality of patient care, and can negatively impact the remaining health care providers. Having fewer physicians for more patients may result in safety concerns for the patient. This may lead to higher use of urgent care or emergency services. Ultimately, continuing to bolster this

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Program will enable Johns Hopkins to attract and retain primary care physicians in shortage areas.

Johns Hopkins urges a **favorable report on Senate Bill 501 – Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding.**

cc: Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Senator Paul G. Pinsky