

**Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants –
Administration and Funding
House Bill 998**

Before the Appropriations Committee

**February 25, 2020
Position: Support**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to share my support for House Bill 998. I am Tiffany Sullivan and I serve as Senior Vice President for Clinical Integration and Ambulatory Services for the University of Maryland Capital Region Health. I relocated to Maryland in 2016 and have experience recruiting primary and specialty care providers in South Carolina and Maryland.

Residents living in rural communities face disparities that result worse health care than that of urban and suburban residents. Residents face challenges including few local providers and remote locations that contribute to lack of access to care. Traveling long distances to reach a health care provider could mean our residents have to take hours off from work for an initial appointment or follow-up, which may cause many to delay or avoid care.

The passage of HB 998 would significantly help to address concerns related to healthcare provider shortages in rural areas but could also pave the way for solutions to extend difficult to recruit specialists to rural areas. This bill would increase the funding for the Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants (LARP) and transfer oversight of the program from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to the Maryland Department of Health. It would require the Governor to include at least \$400,000 in the State Budget for the program for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2021, and increasing the amount to \$1,000,000 in fiscal year 2022 and each year after. This Bill would also require the Department of Health to submit a report to the General Assembly detailing the number of physicians and physician assistants who applied to the program.

LARP provides financial assistance to physicians, physicians completing residencies, and physician assistants practicing in designated geographic areas. The goal of the program is to mitigate the healthcare provider shortages in rural and underserved regions of the state by alleviating some of the financial burdens new doctors and providers face in repaying their student loan debt. According to a 2016 National Health Service Corps participant survey (most recent available data), 88% of participating clinicians remained at their practice obligation site for up to one year after their obligation, and 43% intend to remain for 5 or more years. Scholarships and loan repayment programs are effective in achieving long-term retention of physicians in the communities they serve. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 998.

Respectfully submitted,

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