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Health and Government
Operations Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

CHAIR MAGGIE MCINTOSH

VICE CHAIR MICHAEL A. JACKSON

HOUSE BILL 998

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

FEBRUARY 25, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

Good Afternoon Chairman McIntosh and Vice Chair Jackson. I am here today speaking in support of HB 998 – Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding. This bill would fill a crucial funding gap in our student loan repayment funding, and ensure this programs viability into the future.

Right now there are hundreds of medical students across Maryland making plans for their futures, and a long time ago we decided that if we wanted ensure some of those students end up working in underserved areas we were going to have to give them a little push in that direction.

The Loan Assistance Repayment Program was our way of doing that, and it worked well for a long time. In recent years, however, to program has been neglected. Since 2016 the state’s investment in the MLARP has dropped nearly in half, and in that time applications to the program have only increased. There is clearly a desire from our doctors to serve in the areas that need them. It is up to us to ensure that that is possible. With the student loan crisis hindering our state’s young people, and the opioid epidemic still far from under control, now is not the time to take our foot off the gas of this crucial program.

Additionally, it is worth noting that both parties are working to solve this issue. The Governor agrees with us that the LARP program is underfunded and included \$400,00 in the BRFA for fiscal year 21.

We do recognize, however, that our way of funding the program is not perfect. As exemplified by other states there are alternative funding methods we can explore, which is why included in this bill is a study of the program as well. Essentially though, while the study is being conducted we cannot risk missing those students and patients in need. I will allow the advocates to speak to the minutia of the bill, but I will say that opponents to the bill will suggest reducing it to just the study. We have been working on amendments though to make this more palatable to for them.

In this past years round of applicants alone, of the 82 students who applied to the program 67 were denied due to lack of funding. That's 67 physicians or physicians assistants who will be deep in debt and unable to work in underserved areas because we failed them. And that was just this past year. If we are as committed to raising the bar on healthcare in this state as we say, we need to do better on this simple issue.

Thank you again for your time and I would like to urge a favorable report on HB998.