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POSITION STATEMENT

House Bill 0998- Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding
Appropriations Committee
February 25, 2020

The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS** House Bill 0998 – Maryland Loan Assistance Repayment Program for Physicians and Physician Assistants – Administration and Funding. This bill transfers oversight of the Maryland Loan Assistant Repayment Program (MLARP) for Physicians and Physician Assistants from the Office of Student Financial Assistance within the Maryland Higher Education Commission to the Maryland Department of Health. This bill requires the Maryland Department of Health to submit a report to the General Assembly annually which focuses in part, on the number of eligible physicians and physician assistants who applied for and participated in the repayment loan program. Additionally, the bill will increase the minimum funding for this program to \$1 million (from \$400,000) as the funding stream for MLARP has been reduced over the last 5 years, which greatly decreased the availability of physician and physician assistants in the areas they are needed most.

The Health Resources and Services Administration found there are 52 Medically Underserved Areas/Populations Areas that have too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty or high elderly population in the state.

<https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/mua-find>

The MLARP program is significant because it encourages physicians and physician assistants to work in these state designated areas by providing education loan repayment funds. The physician and physician assistants must serve a 2-year obligation in these state designated health professional shortage areas. The current award for this program is up to \$50,000 per year for a 2-year obligation. In 2017, the Maryland Department of Health's Office of Workforce conducted a retention study. This study found 83% of health care providers agreed to stay in Maryland or at their current practice site after their obligation under MLARP was completed. Therefore, these scholarship and loan repayment programs are effective in achieving long-term retention participants in the communities they serve.

Maryland's rural areas and medically underserved areas need committed, long-term medical physicians and physician assistants to care for members of these special communities. The Council respectfully requests your favorable support of HB0998.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) brings together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of Rural Maryland communities. We provide a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in Rural Maryland.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"