



February 26, 2024

The Honorable Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, Health & Government Operations Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Room 241- House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 784 – Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk,

I am writing to provide you and the Committee with information you may find helpful as you consider HB 784 – Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times.

HB 784 mirrors similar bills from the 2023 legislative session – Senate Bill 387, sponsored by Senator Lewis Young and House Bill 274, sponsored by Delegate Bhandari. The bills established the Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times within MIEMSS and were in response to Maryland’s excessive emergency department (ED) wait times over many years.

Although, ultimately, those bills did not pass, at the request of the Legislature, the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) agreed to convene a workgroup to identify the root causes of ED wait times. The Legislature requested the MHA to issue a report with recommendations, including legislative, regulatory, or other policy initiatives, for reducing emergency department wait times that should be implemented in the State.

The MHA convened the General Assembly Hospital Throughput Work Group in August 2023. The 26 members of the Work Group are listed at: <https://www.mhaonline.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/hospital-throughput-work-group-roster.pdf> The Work Group met several times during the interim to develop recommendations to improve ED wait times. Meeting summaries and resource materials may be viewed on the MHA website at: <https://www.mhaonline.org/transforming-health-care/healthy-hospitals-healthy-communities/hospital-throughput-resources/hospital-throughput-workgroup>

It is our understanding that MHA is nearing completion of the report containing the recommendations of the Work Group and plans to submit the report to the Legislature in the near future. Information and recommendations from that report may help identify the next steps to be taken to address Maryland’s excessive ED wait times.

The Committee may be interested to know that including the most recent MHA effort, there have been at least seven studies of prolonged ED wait times in Maryland since 2002:

- Maryland Hospital Association: General Assembly Hospital Throughput Work Group 2023-2024.

- MIEMSS & Health Services Cost Review Commission: Emergency Department Overcrowding Update. Report to the Joint Chairmen. November 2019.
- MIEMSS & Health Services Cost Review Commission: Report on Emergency Department Overcrowding. Report to the Joint Chairmen. December 2018.
- Maryland Hospital Association. Emergency Department Diversions, Wait Times: Understanding the Causes. 2016-2017.
- Maryland Health Care Commission. Use of Maryland Emergency Departments: An Update and Recommended Strategies to Address Crowding. January 1, 2007.
- Baltimore City Task Force on Emergency Department Crowding: Findings and Recommendations. June 2006.
- Maryland Health Care Commission and Health Services Cost Review Commission. Trends in Maryland Hospital Emergency Department Utilization: An Analysis of Issues and Recommended Strategies to Address Crowding. April 2002.

Finally, we note Delegate Bhandari's companion bill – HB 1143 – Emergency Medical Services – Maryland Emergency Department Wait Time Reduction Commission and Standard Protocols – Establishment. MIEMSS is supporting HB 1143 with amendments offered by the Maryland Department of Health and the Health Services Cost Review Commission. Those amendments are based on the need to consider elevated ED wait times within the context of the entire health care system. We believe the holistic perspective embodied in the MDH/HSCRC amendments is a promising approach that may yield positive results.

I hope the Committee finds this information helpful as it considers HB 784. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Ted

Cc: The Honorable Delegate Harry Bhandari