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**HB 354 Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee
House Health and Government Operations Committee
FAVORABLE
February 6, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk and members of the House Health Government Operations Committee. I am Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy AARP. On behalf of our more than 850,000 members, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 354 Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee. We thank Vice Chair Cullison for sponsoring this important piece of legislation.

AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps people aged 50-Plus and above, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families, such as health care, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities, and protection from financial abuse. Key priorities of our organization include helping all Marylanders achieve financial and health security.

HB 354 establishes the Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program in the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to provide practical and financial support to specified nursing students. The bill also establishes the Maryland Pathway to Nursing Advisory Committee with specified membership to assist the Secretary of Health in the development and implementation of the program. The advisory committee must submit a report on nursing program eligibility for State and federal apprenticeship funding to specified committees.

The program has the following goals:

1. Support certified nursing assistants in licensed practical nursing education programs who intend to practice licensed practical nursing as a career in Maryland or continue to become a RN in the state.
2. Increase the graduation and licensure rates of licensed practical nursing and registered nursing students.
3. Increase the number of licensed practical nurses and registered nurses who reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, and
4. Provide program participants with financial assistance to cover tuition and related fees for licensed practical nursing educational programs, computers, textbooks, and other supplies, and housing, food, and other basic living expenses.

In addition to establishing the pilot, The Secretary of Health must consult with the Maryland Pathway to Nursing Advisory Committee established under the bill in making decisions on how and where to implement the pilot program, and adopting regulations to carry out the program, including participation criteria. The committee must annually report to the Governor and General Assembly in program implementation whether certain licensed practical nursing education programs may be eligible for federal and state funding related to apprenticeship programs, and reports its findings to the Senate Finance Committee and House Health and Government Operations Committee.

AARP believes that this bill helps to strengthen the nursing profession with certified nursing assistants and licensed practical nurses working toward becoming a registered nurses. This will strengthen the nursing workforce. It also helps diversify nursing in the state.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of a qualified and robust health care workforce. The pandemic also exacerbated existing challenges with recruiting, retaining, and training health care workers. The U.S. and Maryland faces shortages of various health care personnel. These shortages are distributed unequally across the country. Most notably, nurse aides, Registered Nurses, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, are in short supply. The lack of primary care providers is especially problematic because they play a central role in managing care for individuals with chronic conditions. Often an Advanced Practice Nurses step in when there is a lack of primary care providers.

We also believe stepping up recruitment and retention of students from groups that are discriminated against, health professional curricula should increase and improve understanding of, and sensitivity to, cultural and ethnic differences that may affect the health care needs and outcomes of increasingly diverse patient populations.

AARP believes that this bill helps to strengthen the nursing profession with certified nursing assistants and licensed practical nurses working toward becoming a registered nurse. This will strengthen the nursing workforce. It also helps diversify nursing in the state. In addition, we also recommend that the state consider helping to build the pathways of nursing careers to help nurses of color achieve graduate degrees in nursing.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Health and Government Operations Committee for a favorable report on HB 354 Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee-Establishment.

If you have questions or need follow up, feel free to contact me at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling me at 410-302-8451.

