



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 15, 2023

To: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair, House Ways & Means Committee

Re: Letter of Support - House Bill 488 - Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program
- Mental Health Professionals in Public Schools

Dear Chair Atterbeary:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 488.

Maryland hospitals are facing the most critical staffing shortage in recent memory. A 2022 [GlobalData](#) report estimates a statewide shortage of 5,000 full-time registered nurses and 4,000 licensed practical nurses. Without intervention, shortages could double or even triple by 2035. MHA's [2022 State of Maryland's Health Care Workforce report](#) outlines a roadmap to ensure Maryland has the health care workforce it needs now and into the future.

There is a growing need for behavioral health services. According to the 2021 Maryland Youth Pandemic Behavior Survey, nearly three in five high school students struggled with mental health issues during the past year.¹ Approximately one in five Maryland teens seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, and 28% reported living with someone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal.² Between 2013 and 2021, emergency department visits for behavioral health conditions climbed from 10.5% to 18.3%. Patient acuity also increased—meaning, there were more patients turning to emergency departments in crisis, and they were sicker when they got there.³

Hospital emergency departments are often the first point of contact or the facility of last resort for individuals suffering from a behavioral health crisis. Patients and families turn to an emergency department for care when they cannot find treatment in the community or when the condition worsens. However, schools can play a critical role in supporting students before they are in crisis if properly resourced.

House Bill 488 would extend the Janet L. Hoffman Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include those who are mental health professionals working in public schools. Loan repayment can be an effective recruitment and retention tool. This legislation supports the well-being of

¹ Maryland Department of Health. (2021). "[Maryland Youth Pandemic Behavior Survey 2021](#)."

² Ibid.

³ HSCRC Case Mix Data

students by helping recruit mental health professionals in public schools and supports the growth of this critical component of the health care workforce.

For these reasons, we ask for a *favorable* report on HB 488.

For more information, please contact:

Jane Krienke, Senior Legislative Analyst, Government Affairs
Jkrienke@mhaonline.org