



The Hospital + Healthsystem
Association of Pennsylvania

Leading for Better Health

June 20, 2024

The Honorable Dan Frankel
Chair, House Health Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
P.O. Box 202023
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2023

The Honorable Kathy Rapp
Republican Chair, House Health Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
P.O. Box 202065
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2065

Dear Chairman Frankel and Chairwoman Rapp:

On behalf of more than 235 members statewide, The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) writes to strongly support House Bill 2382 and to thank you for your sponsorship of this important measure.

House Bill 2382 establishes a program at the Department of Health through which hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), and birthing centers in rural counties and designated medically underserved areas can apply for grants to pay the educational debt owed by licensed physicians, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses. Grants are subject to certain conditions as well as to the funding levels as appropriated by the General Assembly.

We are in the midst a nationwide health care workforce emergency. The commonwealth does not currently have enough medical providers to meet Pennsylvanians' growing health care needs, leaving rural communities' access to care hanging precariously in the balance.

HAP's most recent workforce survey revealed average vacancy rates for nursing support staff and registered nurses in rural hospitals of 28 percent and 26 percent, respectively, compared to 19 percent and 14 percent statewide. Sixty-two of Pennsylvania's 67 counties are full or partial Health Professional Shortage Areas for primary care. Fifty-three counties have full or partial shortages of mental health providers. Forty-seven percent of women in rural counties live more than 30 minutes from a birthing hospital, with least 19 rural Pennsylvania hospitals transitioning away from providing obstetric care in the past two decades. Lack of access to OB/GYNs is one of the most cited barriers.

HB 2382 could provide a substantial boost to struggling facilities' relentless efforts to hire and retain the doctors and nurses they need to provide high-quality care to their communities.

Rural hospitals provide many of the same services and experience many of the same challenges as their urban and suburban counterparts. The challenges are amplified in rural communities, however, because hospitals are often the only source for health care in their communities, provide care for fewer patients than their urban and suburban peers, and typically rely more heavily on below-cost reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid. These are among many factors that combine to undermine rural hospitals' capacity to meet the high fixed expenses



Leading for Better Health

necessary to run safe and compliant facilities. The result is that one in four of Pennsylvania's rural hospitals is currently operating in the red.

House Bill 2382 provides rural hospitals, FQHCs, and birthing centers with an important recruitment incentive and retention mechanism without further eroding their financial stability.

On behalf of the hospital community, HAP supports House Bill 2382. Thank you for your bipartisan work on this legislation in support of the commonwealth's rural communities.

We urge your colleagues to vote yes in Committee and your leaders to swiftly bring to and support the measure on the floor.

Sincerely,

Heather Tyler
Vice President, State Legislative Advocacy

c: Members of the House Health Committee, Leader Matt Bradford, Leader Bryan Cutler