



General Assembly Weekly Report
Week ending January 19, 2024
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Introduction

This week, Governor Moore released the FY2025 budget. As noted earlier, the State is facing a \$761 million deficit, which is forecasted to increase to \$2.7 billion by FY2029 if no additional action is taken by the Administration and/or the General Assembly (i.e., reductions in spending/tax increases). At this time, the Maryland Department of Health has yet to confirm rate increases for Medicaid providers. However, the budget highlights contain the following provisions:

- \$10M in new state funding to implement provider recruitment strategies to build capacity within the provider community and within the Department of Health to ultimately expand services for eight different waiver programs with a goal of reducing home and community-based services waiver waitlists as required by the Waitlist and Registry Reduction (End the Wait) Act of 2022. The waivers allow healthcare professionals to provide care in a person's home or community instead of a long-term care facility.
- \$4.5 million in funding and 14 additional positions in the Office of Health Care Quality. These critical staff investigate allegations of neglect and harm at nursing homes and other healthcare facilities, as well as funding to hire subcontractor nurse surveyors to conduct overdue surveys in Maryland's nursing homes.
- \$92 million in General Funds to increase the reimbursement rates to certain health services providers by three percent in FY 2025.
- More than \$21 million and 300 new positions across various Maryland Department of Health facilities, reflecting opening of new units as well as a two-year commitment to staff MDH facilities 24/7 at a level that enhances safety for staff and residents.

Therefore, there is a strong likelihood that Medicaid providers will receive a rate increase of 3% this Session, but it still needs to be confirmed by the State. Over the next few weeks, there will be Fiscal briefings before various committees of the General Assembly. LifeSpan will continue to report when more information is obtained either on provider rates or on other budget initiatives.

In other news, two notable briefings took place this week:

- The Maryland Department of Health briefed the Senate Finance Committee on the health care workforce and health occupations boards. Briefing materials [here](#).
- The Health and Government Operations Committee received a briefing on the HSCRC Total Cost of Care Model, the AHEAD Model, and on the Improving Hospital Throughput efforts. Briefing materials [here](#).

Lastly, it is expected that the revisions to the assisted living regulations will be released in the Maryland Register on January 26, 2024. LifeSpan will circulate the draft to you for the 30-day comment period.

Legislation

Below is a summary of the legislation that has been introduced as of January 19th. Please note that LifeSpan held a special meeting on Friday, January 19th to discuss **Senate Bill 328: Funding for Wages and Benefits for Nursing Home Workers (Nursing Home Staffing Crisis Funding Act of 2024)**. LifeSpan will be opposing this legislation.

House Bill 349: Department of Aging – Long term Care – Insurance Study

This requires the Department of Aging to contract with an independent consultant to complete an insurance study, which includes actuarial modeling, on public and private options for leveraging resources to help individuals prepare for long-term care services and support needs.

House Bill 354: Maryland Pathway to Nursing Program and Advisory Committee – Establishment. This bill is a re-introduction. It passed the House but did not move in the Senate Finance Committee. The bill would establish a committee within the MDH to create pathways for CNAs to become licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and registered nurses (RNs) and increase the graduation and licensure rates of LPNs and RNs. The goals of the program include (1) supporting certified nursing assistants in licensed practical nursing education programs who intend to practice licensed practical nursing as a career in the State or continue to become a registered nurse (RN) in the State; (2) alleviating the shortage of nursing professionals; (3) increasing the number of licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and RNs that reflect the diversity of the communities they serve; and (4) providing program participants with financial assistance to cover tuition and fees, computers, textbooks, supplies, housing, food, and other living expenses. The Secretary of Health must implement a pilot program at community colleges in at least two geographically diverse areas in the State that offer licensed practical nursing programs before implementing the program statewide. Hearing: 2/6. NOTE: LifeSpan supported last Session.

House Bill 370: Maryland Department of Health – Study on the Effects of and Preparedness for Long-COVID 19.

This bill requires the Maryland Department of Health, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Labor and the Department of Human Services, to conduct a study on the preparedness of health facilities in the State to respond to viral illnesses and the effects of post-viral illnesses resulting from long COVID-19. NOTE: This bill only refers to “long COVID-19”; does not include stakeholder involvement; and is unclear in the drafting whether it is “health facilities” or “public health facilities.”

Senate Bill 347: Medical Cannabis – Employees in Health Care Facilities – Caring for Qualifying Patients.

In this bill, “health care facilities” means an assisted living program, a home health agency, a hospice program, a nursing home, a residential service agency, and an intermediate care facility for individuals with a disability. The bill authorizes (not mandates) an employee: 1) who has been designated in writing to provide care to qualifying patients by the health care facility, 2) for whom

the qualifying patients has authorized the designation; and 3) who has significant responsibility for managing the health care and well-being of the qualifying patients. Designated medical personnel may administer medical cannabis to qualifying patients only if the medical cannabis is: 1) obtained through the qualifying patient's caregiver; and 2) administered in accordance with dosing, timing, and delivery route instructions provided in the certifying provider's written instructions; and are not required to register with the State. The bill also extends current liability protections to the designated employee. NOTE: This bill is modeled after legislation passed in 2020 for administering medical cannabis in public schools. [Guidelines for Public Schools Allowing the Administration of Medical Cannabis to Students \(marylandpublicschools.org\)](https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/Guidelines-for-Public-Schools-Allowing-the-Administration-of-Medical-Cannabis-to-Students)

NOTE: Two bills are on the Client Profile Chart –

House Bill 205/Senate Bill 104: Unemployment Insurance – Modernization Act of 2024.

This bill makes several changes to the calculation of unemployment insurance. Please have the appropriate person in your organization review to determine if the changes are necessary for LifeSpan to consider and take a position.

House Bill 434: Persons Providing Lobbyist Compensation – Statement of Political Contributions – Exemptions for Nonprofits.

This bill is an FYI and directed to the operations of LifeSpan Network that is required to file these reports every six months.

Key Dates

Key dates this Session include:

- January 22nd: Administration bill package introduction date.
- February 5th: Senate Bill Introduction date.
- February 9th: House Bill Introduction date.
- March 18th: Cross-over date.
- April 1st: Budget Bill to be passed by both Chambers.
- April 8th: Sine Die/Last Day of Session.

Legislative Day

Please remember to register for Legislative Day. For the second year, LifeSpan is joining with the Maryland-National Capital Homecare Association, the Hospice & Palliative Care Network of Maryland, and the Maryland Association of Adult Day Services.

[Summary - 2024 Legislative Day in Annapolis \(cvent.com\)](https://www.cvent.com)