

Government Relations Update – May 16, 2023

Pennsylvania Issues

Legislation:

- **HB 106: Patient Safety Act.** On April 28, 2023, Representative Thomas Mehaffie III (R-Dauphin) introduced legislation to establish registered nurse to patient staffing ratios for Pennsylvania hospitals dependent upon the acuity of the hospital unit. Representatives Joe Emrick (R-Northampton), Shelby Labs (R-Bucks), Jack Rader (R-Monroe), Robert Freeman (D-Northampton), Jeanne McNeill (D-Lehigh), Maureen Madden (D-Monroe), Steve Malagari (D-Montgomery), Pete Schweyer (D-Lehigh), and Steve Samuelson (D-Northampton) cosponsored the bill. Supporters assert the legislation will improve quality, but, in reality, nurse staffing ratios would severely restrict access to care.

The legislation is currently in the House Health Committee. The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) and St. Luke's University Health Network strongly oppose this legislation. On May 2, 2023, Stephanie Pollock, Patient Care Manager for the St. Luke's Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, testified against the bill before the House Health Committee. In addition, St. Luke's has been meeting with legislators to explain the negative impacts of the bill and to recommend alternative legislative solutions, including educational incentives to alleviate the nursing shortage crisis.

- **HB 849: Adult Mental Health Program Funding.** As previously reported, on July 11, 2022, Governor Tom Wolf (D) signed Act 54 of 2022 into law, which established the Behavioral Health Commission for Adult Mental Health. The Commission was charged with allocating the \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for adult behavioral health needs. On April 10, 2023, Representative Mike Schlossberg (D-Lehigh) introduced legislation to appropriate the funding in accordance with the recommendations of the Commission, as follows: (1) \$40 million would be allocated to ensure the stability and expansion of mental health services; (2) \$34 million would be spent to retain existing behavioral health staff and providers and to help them develop additional skills; (3) \$25.5 million would be dedicated to expand criminal justice and public safety programs; and (4) \$500,000 would be used for a study to evaluate the overall impact of the appropriations. St. Luke's supports the bill.

Miscellaneous

- **Nurse Licensure Delays:** On April 24, 2023, the Senate Professional Licensure Committee held a hearing on professional licensing delays in health care. Chairman Patrick Stefano (R-Fayette) and Minority Chairman Lisa Boscola (D-Northampton) invited St. Luke's to participate in the hearing, alongside several other healthcare representatives. Sarah Biggs, St. Luke's Assistant Vice President of Talent Acquisition, testified on behalf of St. Luke's.

Federal Issues

Legislation:

- **H.R.2389: Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act.** On March 29, 2023, Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Terri Sewell (D-AL) introduced legislation intended to combat the nation's physician shortage and improve access to health care by expanding the number of Medicare funded medical residency positions by 14,000 over seven years. A share of these funded positions would be allocated to hospitals in rural areas and health professional shortage areas, hospitals in states with new medical schools or branch campuses, and hospitals already training residents above their funded cap. St. Luke's, HAP, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and the American Hospital Association support this legislation.