

Government Relations Update – July 18, 2023

Pennsylvania Issues

Legislation:

- **HB 106: Patient Safety Act.** As previously reported, 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), 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.

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 help alleviate the nurse staffing crisis.

On June 6, 2023, the bill was approved by the House Health Committee along party lines with support from the Democratic members. The approved version includes an amendment prohibiting hospitals from decreasing the number of non-physicians on the patient care team once the legislation becomes effective. On June 28, 2023, the House passed the bill. The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) and St. Luke's University Health Network strongly oppose this legislation.

- **HB 479: Mileage Reimbursement for Ambulance Services.** On March 16, 2023, Representative Jamie Flick (R-Lycoming) introduced legislation: (1) increasing payments for Medicaid patients transported by ambulance to an amount equal to rates paid by Medicare; and (2) eliminating payment caps for transports beyond twenty miles. These changes would increase reimbursement to St. Luke's Emergency Transport Services by approximately \$250,000 per year. On June 5, 2023, the House passed the bill. On June 29, 2023, the Senate amended and passed the bill, sending it back to the House for consideration. HAP and St. Luke's support this legislation.
- **SB 739: Telemedicine.** On June 2, 2023, Senator Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) reintroduced legislation intended to encourage the broader use of telemedicine services within the Commonwealth. The proposed legislation would define telemedicine and offer guidelines outlining who can provide telemedicine services. On June 27, 2023, the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee passed the bill. While HAP and St. Luke's are supportive of the bill, both seek to include a requirement that insurers reimburse a health care provider for health care services delivered through telemedicine at the same rate as health care services delivered in an in-person setting.

New Jersey Issues

Miscellaneous

- **2023-24 State Budget:** On June 30, 2023, Governor Phil Murphy (D) signed into law the New Jersey budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. The \$54.3 billion spending plan includes a property tax relief program for seniors commencing January 2026. It also includes \$243 million in funding to hospitals from federal COVID-19 grants. St. Luke's Hospital – Warren Campus has requested \$1.5 million in funding for hospital equipment under the grant program.