

## Government Relations Update – June 27, 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 sent to the House Health Committee, where it was approved 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. The bill is expected to be considered by the House this week. The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) and St. Luke's University Health Network strongly oppose this legislation.

- **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. On May 23, 2023, the bill was approved by the House Human Services Committee. On June 7, 2023, the legislation was passed by the House and sent to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee for consideration. HAP and St. Luke's support this bill.
- **HB 1500: Increasing the Minimum Wage.** On June 12, 2023, Representative Jason Dawkins (D-Philadelphia) introduced legislation to increase the minimum wage in Pennsylvania to \$11.00 per hour effective January 1, 2024, \$13.00 per hour effective January 1, 2025, \$15.00 per hour effective January 1, 2026, and permanently index it to inflation rates thereafter. The Pennsylvania minimum wage has been \$7.25 since 2009. On June 13, 2023, the bill was reported out of the House Labor and Industry Committee. On June 20, 2023, the bill was amended in the House Appropriations Committee to allow an employer to pay training wages at a rate not less than the federal minimum wage to employees under the age of 20 for the first 60 days of their employment. On June 20, 2023, the amended bill was passed by the House on a largely party line vote with the Democrats voting in the affirmative. The bill now awaits consideration in the Senate.