O'Malley Brown

LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS FOR MARYLAND

HELPING ENSURE HIGH QUALITY HEALTH CARE BY ATTRACTING AND RETAINING THE BEST NURSES

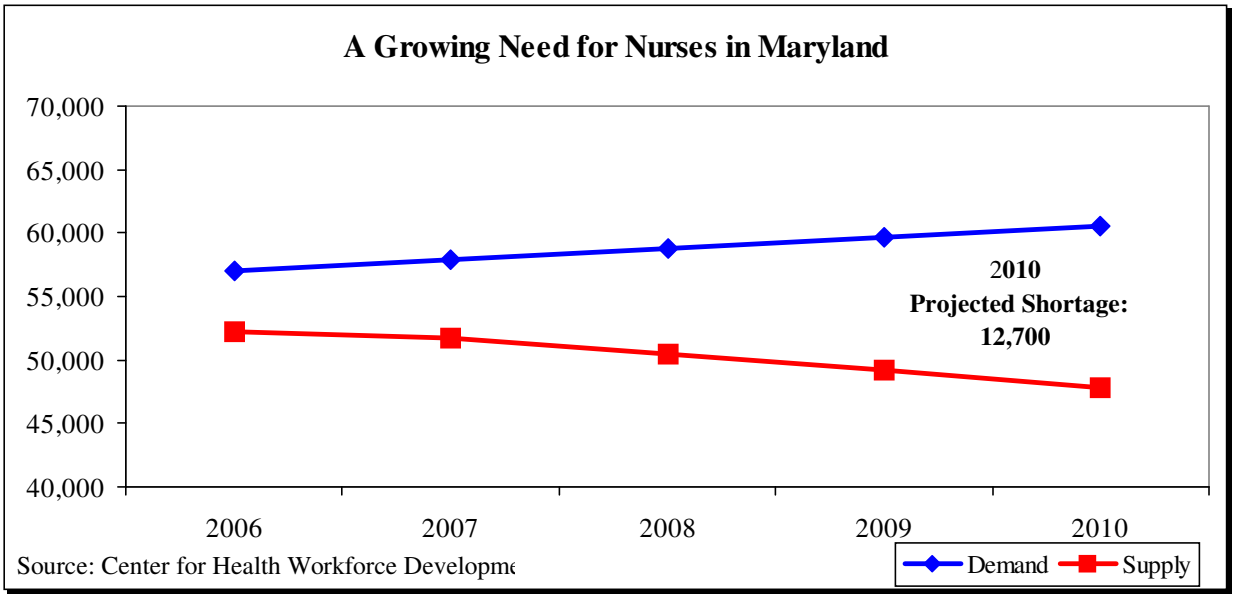
"Too often, America's nurses are overworked, underpaid and undervalued. America is facing a nursing shortage, and it is only getting worse."

United States Senator Barbara Mikulski

Introduction

Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown know that nurses are the backbone of Maryland's health care system and play an invaluable role in delivering the best patient care. Staffing shortages can lead to preventable medical errors and longer patient recovery periods as nurses struggle to carry out prescribed treatments and monitor patient care.

An adequate supply of well-trained and committed nurses is a critical component of ensuring that Marylanders have access to the highest quality health care services. Unfortunately, hospital surveys show that nearly one in 10 nursing positions stand vacant in Maryland, positions that typical remain open for nearly two full months. Further compounding the problem, nursing positions experience a turnover rate of more than 11 percent turnover rate due to the many rigorous demands of the job. With the average age of Maryland nurses approaching 50, coupled with increasing numbers of hospitalizations and demand for health care services, it has been projected that Maryland will have nearly 13,000 fewer nurses than are needed by 2010.



Across the country, other states have launched efforts to cope with this national problem. Already this year the Kansas Board of Regents unveiled a ten-year, $30 million plan to address its nursing shortage, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Foundation (PHEF) announced the creation of six new nursing education initiatives focused primarily on addressing the faculty shortages in nursing faculties, and North Carolina expanded options with accelerated degree option and twice-a-year admissions.

Maryland has a Statewide Commission on the Crisis in Nursing that has been meeting for six years and has made numerous recommendations to address and mitigate what is clearly a crisis. Despite the recognized importance of this issue, no serious action has been taken.

Maryland can and must do better.

Existing Efforts: A Slow and Inadequate Response

In January 2006, Governor Ehrlich proposed consolidating Maryland's existing nursing and teaching scholarships into a single "workforce shortage scholarship" and described the launching of "an ambitious initiative to ensure an adequate supply of nurses for the 21st Century." These statements came almost three full years after the release of the University of Maryland's Center for Health Workforce Development's report *Maryland's Nursing Shortage: A Workforce Crisis*, the report that brought into clear focus the state's looming nursing shortage crisis.

The Ehrlich Administration introduced and passed legislation during the Maryland General Assembly's 2006 legislative session establishing the "Nurse Support Program Assistance Fund" in the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). While the legislation directed MHEC to start awarding nursing student grants annually, this effort only reconstitutes a State initiative launched in 2001 by the Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC), the independent hospital rate-setting commission. The 2001 effort raised hospital rates via regulation by 0.1% to fund "individual nurse retention strategies at hospitals."

Improving Nursing Recruitment, Education, and Retention Efforts

Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown know that if left unaddressed, Maryland's looming nursing shortage will have dire consequences for the state's health care system, as well as the quality and cost of patient care. Maryland's shortage of nurses is not just a health care crisis, but represents a squandered workforce development opportunity. While Maryland's supply of trained nurses lags, there is no shortage of committed candidates willing to answer this vocational calling. Regrettably, qualified candidates are regularly turned away from nursing programs in the state due to a lack of space and qualified instructors. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown know that ensuring Marylanders access to affordable high quality health care requires improving nursing recruitment, education, and retention efforts:

Recruitment: With the significant increases in tuition implemented by the Ehrlich Administration, obtaining undergraduate and advanced degrees in nursing has been put further and further out of reach. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown understand that increasing tuition in these programs and not providing sufficient scholarships to pursue the nursing profession will

only exacerbate the crisis. In order to accelerate the flow of quality nurses into Maryland's health care institutions, Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown will support expanding scholarship assistance through the State Nursing Scholarship and Living Grant program. Via this program, students receive scholarships and grants in exchange for a commitment to serve as a nurse at an eligible Maryland licensed hospital, public health agency, nursing home, home health agency or adult day care center. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown will also work to enhance the long-term supply of nursing professionals by promoting nursing internship programs in junior high and high schools to attract more students and show them a clear pathway into a profession with a multitude of job opportunities. Finally, tuition at institutions of higher education cannot be allowed to negatively affect efforts to recruit talented individuals into the profession of nursing.

Education: One of the most frustrating elements of Maryland's nursing shortage crisis is that nursing programs at the state's 15 community colleges and nine baccalaureate colleges have been turning away qualified nursing applicants each year due to a lack of trained nursing instructors. Just a year ago, *The Daily Record* reported that the University of Maryland School of Nursing turned away 400 qualified applicants during its fall admissions cycle. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown will address the need for access to nursing programs by enhancing the scholarship assistance available for experienced nurses to gain the necessary educational training to become nursing instructors and by ensuring that institutions of higher education have the necessary resources to expand nursing education programs in an affordable manner.

Retention: The long-term success of improved recruitment and education efforts depends on retaining new and experienced nursing professionals. According to the Statewide Commisssion on the Crisis in Nursing, after adjusting for inflation, RNs salaries have not increased in the last nine years. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown believe that compensation is directly related to retention and will advocate for policies that provide incentives for employers to provide market-based compensation and recognition of experience and years of service. Additionally, State agencies and the Health Services Cost Review Commission should ensure that adequate resources are provided to the health care system to permit market-based compensation of nurses in Maryland. Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown also recognize that the rigors of the nursing profession will require support and incentives for improvements in working conditions that will help retain more nurses in the profession.