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### **Governor Signs No Cost Health Care Legislation**

Governor Martin O'Malley signed into law this week a bill that eliminates a barrier to nurse practitioner care in Maryland. Approximately 3400 nurse practitioners will be able to start working, change jobs, and volunteer without a 2-6 months waiting period. Up to this time, a written collaborative agreement has been required between the nurse practitioner and a physician. Prior to this legislative change, the agreement would be reviewed by a joint committee of physicians and nurses at two boards and was often delayed through the bureaucratic process. Meanwhile the nurse practitioner couldn't work and the health care provider shortage intensified. In many cases, physicians even charged nurse practitioners to sign the agreement. Fortunately, the newly passed legislation will allow nurse practitioners to simply file a statement with the Board of Nursing, their licensing and regulatory body, attesting that they have identified physicians with whom they will collaborate and consult, or to refer to as needed. This does not change scope of practice but does stop unneeded bureaucratic oversight. The professional associations for the nurse practitioners and the physicians worked together to reach this compromise, to help address access to care, at no added cost. Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with advanced education and training that prepares them to diagnose health problems, prescribe drugs and medical treatments, and identify cases that need to be referred on to physicians.