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## **Gov. Wolf Celebrates Bipartisan House Bill 253, Appropriating \$225 Million to Support Health Care Workforce**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Governor Tom Wolf today was joined by Democratic and Republican legislative members to celebrate House Bill 253, which appropriates \$225 million to support Pennsylvania’s heroic health care workforce.

“Three weeks ago, my administration convened a working group including all four caucuses to identify immediate investments to support the health care workforce overburdened by staffing shortages after years of battling the pandemic on the front lines,” said Gov. Wolf. “Together, Democrats and Republicans came together in a bipartisan effort to address this issue through House Bill 253. I am proud to sign this critical legislation into law to support our health care workforce and ensure Pennsylvanians can continue to receive quality care for emergency health issues and life-saving procedures.

In recent months, Pennsylvania’s health care workforce has been under extreme stress as hospitals and health care facilities reach and exceed capacity while seeing patients with higher levels of acuity. Staffing shortages and high numbers of patients have contributed to hospitals reaching capacity and needing to divert patients to other equally burdened facilities. In response, hospitals and health care systems asked the commonwealth for funding specifically for recruitment and retention of key personnel.

House Bill 253 as amended appropriates \$225 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding to support the health care workforce in Pennsylvania. The funding is set to support the following health care areas:

- \$100 million to be distributed to all acute care, critical access, and children’s hospitals licensed by the Department of Health on a per-bed basis. The funding will be used strictly for recruitment and retention payments to direct care staff.
- \$110 million to be distributed on a per-bed basis to high-Medical Assistance hospitals, designated Critical Access Hospitals, and inpatient and residential behavioral health facilities for recruitment and retention payments to key staff.

- \$15 million to quadruple the funds available for the [nurse loan forgiveness program](#) at Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), a high-demand program which has already received more than 8,000 applications in advance of the March 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

Governor Wolf was joined by Democratic and Republican members of the General Assembly in the Governor's Reception Room to celebrate the legislation.

"Our health care workers have been pushed to capacity physically, financially, mentally, and emotionally these last two years as we battle the Covid-19 pandemic," Senate Democratic Leader Jay Costa said. "Not only do they deserve our support and continued advocacy for every eligible person to get vaccinated, but they also need the resources to continue this battle against Covid-19."

"Delivering on a promise to the people of Pennsylvania, the Senate, House, and Governor took a significant step towards managing out of the COVID-19 pandemic today by making a strategic investment in supporting our hospitals and frontline healthcare works," said Senate Majority Leader Kim Ward. "These dedicated nurses, who are exhausted and strained, have seen us through our darkest days. This funding will help lessen the impact of the pandemic's effect on our frontline workers by helping our hospitals to retain acute nursing staff and take care of their patients as these facilities are stressed to the max."

"The past two years have been unlike any before them. The demand on our health care system has been enormous and our frontline health care providers who have worked ceaselessly have shouldered one of the greatest burdens," House Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton said. "This \$225 million relief package is an investment in the system and the professionals who have given so much to support and care for our communities before the pandemic and since."

The convened working group and legislation are part of the [multi-layered approach](#) the Wolf Administration is taking to address and mitigate the current crisis in Pennsylvania, including deploying state-led strike teams to hospitals, launching regional decompression sites for hospitals and long-term care facilities, working with the federal government to stand up two regional large-scale COVID-19 testing sites, and expanding Pennsylvania's testing contract to support nine high-volume testing sites across the commonwealth.

"Throughout the pandemic I have called on Pennsylvanians to make choices that positively impact their loved ones and neighbors," said Gov. Wolf. "I am proud to stand alongside both Democratic and Republican members who have heard that call and to sign this legislation into law providing necessary funding to the commonwealth's most critical asset, our health care employees."

In addition to the funding to support the health care workforce, House Bill 253 also creates the Opioid Abuse Child Impact Task Force to focus on improving the safety, well-being and permanency of substance-exposed infants and other young children affected by their parents' substance abuse disorders.

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