



Larry Hogan  
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford  
Lt. Governor

Mary Pat Seurkamp, Ph.D.  
Chair

James D. Fielder, Jr., Ph.D.  
Secretary

September 23, 2021

Dear Presidents, Deans, Directors, and Faculty Members:

First, thank you for your many efforts to train and retrain our nursing and medical professionals over the past 18 months. Your work to ensure we have new cohorts of qualified medical professionals has helped ensure that Marylanders receive the best care possible during a global pandemic.

In light of medical staffing shortages, last academic year we encouraged campus leadership to consider 3 ways to provide assistance: provide support around vaccination distribution, encouraging students to apply for emergency credentials, and encouraging early exit for nursing students.

As this time, Maryland continues to face a nursing shortage, particularly at Maryland hospitals. I, along with Secretary Schrader at the Maryland Department of Health, encourage you to create pathways for nursing students to complete their program of study in an accelerated manner so that they can enter into the workforce as quickly as possible. Additional information is provided below.

### **Early Exit for Nursing Students**

Last academic year, a few colleges coordinated efforts with the Maryland Board of Nursing and our agency to allow nursing students to “exit early.” Doing so, in turn, allowed a student to sit for the nursing exam (NCLEX) sooner and establish licensure as quickly as possible. We encourage your campus to consider implementing early exit this fall semester for your nursing students in queue to graduate.

We want to be clear about what exactly early exit is and is not. Early exit is not a change in the curriculum. All learning outcomes, course objectives, and program outcomes must be preserved. A change in the curriculum would require program review by our agency and may require review by the Maryland Board of Nursing. Additionally, Maryland nursing programs must continue to meet accreditation requirements. We must maintain that the nursing field is of high-quality and that students are aptly prepared to enter into the workforce.

In order to implement an early exit strategy for nursing students, your campus will need to consider innovative strategies to ensure all learning outcomes and objectives are met. One way to do this is to truncate the last 4-6 weeks of the semester into intensive full-day class sessions to ensure all material is covered and students are properly assessed. Another method is to allow students to take the final exam (or other relevant exams) at an earlier date to demonstrate competencies. A third method is to offer early exit eligibility to students with significantly high cumulative programmatic GPAs (e.g., 3.9 or higher). We understand that there are other considerations to take into account that may be out of your control (e.g., access to internship hours). However, we ask that you seriously consider any adjustments that do not compromise the integrity of your nursing program *and* allows to students to enter into the workforce as quickly as possible. This may include adjusting class schedules and meeting times.

If your campus develops an early exit strategy for your nursing students, please send a summative policy to our offices and the Maryland Board of Nursing for record keeping purposes. The policy should establish who is eligible for early exit, what is required for early exit, a statement that the curricular requirements will not change, and any other relevant information. This policy will also help your institution ensure equity in implementing an early exit strategy for your nursing students. We have included with this communication a letter from Governor Hogan and a public notice from the Maryland Board of Nursing supporting early exit as a strategy to address the current workforce shortage needs due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Again, thank you for your ongoing support during this global crisis. Your leadership is invaluable. Please share this communication with your campus community. If you have questions regarding this early exit initiative, please contact Dr. Emily A. A. Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs.

Thank you,



Dr. James D. Fielder  
Secretary

CC: MHEC Segmental Advisory Council  
MHEC Faculty Advisory Council  
MHEC Student Advisory Council  
Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary, Maryland Department of Health  
Karen Evans, Executive Director, Maryland Board of Nursing  
Ted Delbridge, Executive Director, Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems