



Larry Hogan  
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford  
Lt. Governor

Andrew R. Smarick  
Chair

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

January 14, 2021

Dear Presidents, Deans, Directors, and Faculty Members:

As you know, the Covid-19 pandemic has placed a significant staffing burden on many hospitals and nursing care facilities throughout Maryland. There are 3 ways you, as campus leaders, can help address the staffing needs in Maryland. Please share this information with your students and colleagues.

### **Vaccination Distribution**

There will be an increasing need for staffing support at vaccination centers as the Covid-19 vaccine becomes more readily available. Your campus may offer allied and professional health programs, in which advanced students have a foundational knowledge of healthcare. These students may be able to assist health professionals in providing the vaccine. Additionally, the vaccination centers may be in need for general work that any student can perform, such as database input, directing traffic, checking people in, and other support work. We encourage campus leadership to contact their local health department to identify staffing shortages and coordinate efforts so that students can provide necessary support. Some of these positions may be paid positions. If your campus is unable to successfully connect with your local public health department, please contact our offices and we can provide assistance.

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

Last spring and this past fall, 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 spring 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 innovate 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 allow students to take the final exam (or other relevant exams) at an earlier date to demonstrate competencies. A third method would be 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* allow 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.

### **Emergency Credentials for Nursing and Respiratory Therapy Students**

Please also note that there are emergency credentials that non-graduating nursing (and respiratory therapy) students may be eligible for; these credentials have been available since last spring. The emergency credentials allow current students with some foundational healthcare knowledge to be employable at a hospital or other health facility while they continue their academic studies. More information about the emergency credentials can be found on the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services licensure website<sup>1</sup>. We encourage your campus to promote these emergency credentials to applicable students.

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  
Karen Evans, Executive Director, Maryland Board of Nursing  
Ted Delbridge, Executive Director, Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.miemsslicense.com/lms/public/portal#/linkpage/35765ec8-7a3a-eb11-80d8-001dd8b723fb> see “nursing Students/Clinical Externs” and “Respiratory Therapy Students/Clinical Externs”