

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE REPORT

2024 Legislative Session

Reference No.: CR-006-2025

Draft No.: 1

Committee: Health, Human Services, and Public Safety

Date: February 20, 2025

Action: FAV

REPORT:

Committee Vote: Favorable 4-0 (In favor Council Members Fisher, Blegay, Hawkins, and Watson)

Absent: Council Member Olson

The Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee met on February 20, 2025, to consider CR-006-2025. Sponsored by Council Member Blegay, the legislation extends the Task Force's reporting timeline, which was established by CR-82-2023, to address hospital emergency room wait times and expand the membership by adding two representatives. The newly added members include representatives from the Office of the Sheriff and the Police Department.

The Task Force would now be authorized to present a final report and a summary of its findings to the County Council on or before November 14, 2025.

Mr. David Noto, Legislative Budget & Policy Analyst, provided a Policy Analysis and Fiscal Impact Statement indicating that the adoption of CR-006-2025 is not likely to have any direct or indirect fiscal impact.

Council Member Blegay emphasized the complexity of emergency room wait time issues, believing staffing was the primary concern but realizing through the Task Force that it is a multifaceted problem. She then outlined some of the accomplishments and tasks completed thus far: visiting all emergency rooms in the county, receiving presentations from hospital staff, and reviewing the Huron report. Council Member Blegay expressed that additional meetings with the state are planned, necessitating more time to complete the final report. The Task Force also added two new members after recognizing the critical role of law enforcement in this issue.

The following citizens on the Task Force spoke in support of CR-006-2025: Mr. Jeremy Cooper, a Prince George's County resident, emphasized that the emergency room challenges stem from broader social determinants of health, including housing instability, food insecurity, transportation barriers, and limited access to primary care. He further expressed that these systemic issues require a coordinated response beyond hospital-level solutions. Mr. Cooper urged the county to lead emergency care reform by promoting transparency, integrating social determinants of health screening, expanding hospital capacity and urgent care options, and investing in workforce and community-based solutions. He stressed the need for immediate improvements, such as staffing and data transparency, and long-term healthcare infrastructure investments.

Caroline Williams-Pierce spoke in support, expressing that she joined the Task Force after experiencing a seven-hour emergency room wait with her father. She has since learned about the deeper systemic issues affecting emergency rooms. She highlighted how emergency rooms serve as a public necessity, providing care for the uninsured, the homeless, and those managing chronic conditions. She emphasized that emergency room delays impact patients, EMTs, and hospital staff. She urged the Council to extend the Task Force's work, arguing that more time is needed to compile their findings and implement meaningful solutions to reduce wait times and improve healthcare access.

Erica Turner, representing the Office of the Acting County Executive, echoed the need to extend the Task Force's work. She acknowledged the progress made through hospital presentations but noted that significant challenges remain. Despite the hospital's efforts, she highlighted ongoing emergency room overcrowding and stressed the need for further collaboration. Additionally, she points out the overlooked issue of public safety officials, including police and EMS, spending excessive time in emergency rooms when bringing in psychiatric patients. She urged continued focus on these concerns to improve emergency care efficiency.

John Erzen, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Acting County Executive, expressed support for CR-006-2025 and commended Council Member Blegay for her leadership. Mr. Erzen noted that this is a regional and national issue and emphasized Prince George's County's leadership role in addressing this issue.

Dinora Hernandez stated that the Office of Law reviewed the resolution, found it to be in proper legislative form, and saw no legal impediments to its adoption.

The Committee members all expressed strong support, emphasizing the importance of the Task Force's work in addressing emergency room challenges. They highlighted personal experiences and the need for lasting improvements in healthcare.

Council Member Blegay motioned to move favorably, which Council Member Watson seconded. The motion passed 4-0.