

Senate bill goes to governor for signature

Allows freestanding medical facility to operate in QA's County

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ANNAPOLIS —A bill that will allow a quicker review and approval process for a freestanding medical facility in Queen Anne's County has passed both houses of the state legislature.

The Maryland House of Delegates voted 136-0 Wednesday to pass Senate Bill 750, sponsored by State Sen. E.J. Pipkin, R-36-Upper Shore, and five western shore senators. The Maryland Senate voted 45-1 on March 15 to approve SB 750. The bill now goes to Gov. Martin O'Malley for his signature.

Pipkin said he was "extremely pleased" the bill cleared the House. He said in a news release the first major hurdle was getting a source to pay for the facility, "which everyone agrees will not be a money-maker." The University of Maryland Medical System "stepped up to the plate to write the check," Pipkin said.

"On behalf of the people of Queen Anne's County and all the hundreds of thousands of Marylanders who travel the Bay Bridge, I cannot thank UMMS enough," Pipkin said.

SB 750 would allow a freestanding medical facility to operate in Queen Anne's County as a pilot project connected administratively with a hospital in Talbot County. The only hospital in Talbot County, the Memorial Hospital at Easton, is owned by Shore Health System, which signed an affiliation agreement last year with UMMS. UMMS announced in early March it was committed to building a freestanding emergency department in Queen Anne's County.

The legislation allows a stand-alone facility to obtain a license from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene without going through the review process that would be required by the Maryland Health Care Commission.

The pilot project in Queen Anne's County would be patterned after the pilot project in Montgomery County, where the Shady Grove Adventist Emergency Center in Germantown is affiliated with the Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in Rockville.

The amended version of SB 750 includes language that addresses concerns of Talbot County Council and Easton Town Council officials, who worried the original bill could have allowed Shore Health System to move Memorial Hospital out of Easton without going through a public review process.

"The lack of an emergency care facility in (Queen Anne's) County represents a serious and unacceptable gap in medical care," Pipkin said. "County emergency services personnel told the Maryland Senate and House committees that people

with medical emergencies were at the mercy of bridge and highway traffic jams and getting these people to appropriate emergency care within a reasonable time was a matter of life and death.”

“I am very pleased that the bipartisan effort led by State Sen. E.J Pipkin was successful,” Queen Anne’s County Commissioner Gene Ransom said in a statement. “As the legislative process comes to a close, the (Queen Anne’s County) Commission needs to act quickly to find an acceptable location to place this much-needed facility.”

Ransom said he appreciated the efforts by Pipkin, UMMS, and “all the citizens who worked hard to pass the legislation.”

Pipkin said he was “grateful for the unwavering support and tireless work of the Queen Anne’s County Commissioners, officials and residents who played a crucial role in getting state approval for the emergency facility project.”

He said the proposal is “now in the hands of the county commissioners and officials” and “work must now be done on the county level to make the emergency medical care facility a reality.”

“We have identified a critical health care problem and have taken action to fix it,” said Pipkin.

Ransom said he appreciated “the high quality services” currently provided to Queen Anne’s residents by Anne Arundel Medical Center in Annapolis, Chester River Hospital Center in Chestertown, and Shore Health System.