

SB 434 - Labor and Employment - Occupational Safety and Health - Heat Stress Standards
Thursday, February 20th, 2020
FAVORABLE

To: Hon. Delores Kelley, Chair and members of the Senate Finance Committee
From: Gino Renne, President, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, VP, UFCW International

On behalf of the 9,000 members of UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, I express our strong support for SB 434- Occupational Safety and Health- Heat Stress Standards. We represent workers with Montgomery County, the Maryland Park and Planning Commission and the Housing Opportunities Commission who work in environments that would be impacted by this legislation.

One of these members is Felicia Yates, a 61 year old Park and Planning Maintenance Worker with asthma. She became so dizzy when cutting grass in the grueling summer heat that she fell off of the lawn mower and had to crawl to the administrative building. Other members repair buses in hot depots or are highway maintenance workers that lay 350 degree asphalt that on our roads.

Extreme weather is nothing new to Marylanders. We know how dangerously hot and humid it can become and we've now recorded years of record warm temperatures. These rising temperatures make this legislation more important than ever. In 2018 there were 28 heat related deaths in Maryland.

The Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) sets standards related to worker's health and safety on the job. Unfortunately, the MOSH follows the Occupational Safety and Health Act which **has no regulations requiring employers to protect their workforce from heat-related illness.**

While the General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970, states that employers are required to provide their employees with a place of employment that "is free from recognizable hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious harm to employees," we've seen employers flout these regulations and we've seen a huge decline in enforcement of workplace protections most recently. In fact, from 2016 to 2018, OSHA inspections for heat declined by 49 percent.

The lack of implicit inclusion of heat stress protections in the OSHA standards could allow employers to escape responsibility.

It is our opinion that this is indefensible. All workers deserve to go home to their families at the end of the day.

SB 434 – Occupational Safety and Health – Heat Stress Standards – can protect Maryland workers. We urge you to pass this legislation.