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SB 897: Department of Health – Residential Service Agencies – Training Requirements

Hearing before the Finance Committee, March 5, 2020

Position: SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Workplace Justice Project works to expand and enforce the right of low-wage workers to an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. The PJC supports SB 897, which would require that Residential Service Agencies (RSAs) provide home care workers with a few hours of training on caring for individuals with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Maryland faces an increasingly dire shortage of personal care aides, and that shortage is largely caused by low wages and poor job quality. In the PJC's experience, many such care employees are misclassified as independent contractors, making it more difficult for them to receive proper pay, workers' compensation when if they are injured, and other basic protections. A 2018 [study](#)¹ found that Maryland will need nearly 40 percent more direct services workers over the next ten years, but suggested that poor job quality is a key cause the worker shortage. Key findings from that study include:

- The 2017 median hourly wage for Maryland's personal care aides – the type of workers RSAs most often employ – was just \$11.65.
- Adjusted for inflation, these workers' wages actually *decreased* by 7 percent from 2007 to 2017.
- The median annual earnings for a residential care worker are just \$22,177.
- About 37% of such workers receive public assistance.
- More than 15% of these workers lack health insurance.

Dementia training is critically important, but workers should not bear the cost of that training. Residential care workers already contend with poverty, low wages, and frequent misclassification as independent contractors. Dementia training would help them do their jobs, but they should not bear the cost of that training.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **SUPPORTS SB 897** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. Should you have any questions, please call David Rodwin at 410-625-9409 ext. 249.

¹ PHI, *The Direct Services Workforce in Long-Term Services and Supports in Maryland and the District of Columbia*, 2018, <https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DSWorkers-Maryland-2018-PHI.pdf>