



**PRINCE GEORGE'S**  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
EST. 1924

February 8, 2021

The Honorable Delores Kelly  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 East Wing  
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Kelly,

The Prince George's Chamber of Commerce having 600 business members who employ over 30,000 residents strongly oppose the Essential Workers Protection Act Senate Bill 486. This emergency bill, during the COVID-19 pandemic and other crisis deemed by the Governor, increases the base hourly pay for essential workers by \$3.00 per hour and requires a two-week leave benefit.

In Prince George's County, over 1/3 of its businesses have closed and, for the businesses that remain open, they are experiencing a 70% reduction in revenue. Despite these conditions, businesses are taking every measure to retain employees, comply with federal, state, and local health guidelines, and engage in philanthropic activities that help those in need. Even with challenges to stay afloat, businesses are leading the way in serving communities and now is not the time to add costs that make doing business in Maryland excruciatingly difficult.

As drafted, problems with the Essential Workers Protection Act are as follows:

- **Broad Vague Definitions:** Definitions of emergency, essential worker, and essential employer are broad and vague going beyond the scope of a public health emergency and capturing nearly all employers in the state.
- **Unintended Consequences:** If this bill passes, businesses are likely to reduce staff, change hours of operation and other benefits to comply with increases in cost and loss of revenue.
- **Circumvent Collective Bargaining:** The legislation would circumvent collective bargaining agreements and the good faith efforts employers made to negotiate benefits with employee unions.
- **New Leave Mandate:** As drafted, the legislation mandates a new and paid leave program that would require employers to provide 3 days of bereavement leave and 14 days of health leave. This does not consider existing leave options employers are already required to provide. The provision also does not require the employee to prove they contracted the illness at work.
- **Refusal to Work:** If passed, the bill will afford essential employees the right to refuse work but does not include a process for the employer to address the employees concerns.

The Prince George's Chamber of Commerce urges an unfavorable vote. Further, any bill of this magnitude, must involve a working group which includes the business community that is charged with reviewing consequences and economic impact.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David C. Harrington". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

David C. Harrington  
President & CEO

Cc: The Honorable Malcolm Augustine  
The Honorable Melony Griffith

***4640 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 130; Lanham, Maryland 20706  
(P) 301-731-5000 (F) 301-731-8015; [www.pgcoc.org](http://www.pgcoc.org)***