



SB0486 -- Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act
Official Testimony
Position: **FAVORABLE**

To Chair Kelley & Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Cyntira Gilchrist. I am a Certified Nursing Assistant and Geriatric Nursing Assistant at a Long-Term Care facility in Baltimore County, where I have worked for five years. I'm also a union member with 1199SEIU. I love what I do. I care for my patients, feed them, bathe them, dress them, groom them, and keep them company. The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act will help keep me, my co-workers, and my patients as safe as possible during COVID19.

Every day working during this pandemic has been very stressful. I'm tired. I'm overworked. And I don't feel appreciated at all by the management at my facility. Everyone says healthcare workers are heroes, but they are not treating us that way. This has caused a lot of my coworkers to quit their jobs or be scared to come to work, so now my department is understaffed. That means I am not able to spend quality time with my patients. Not having enough time for patient care is heartbreaking because their families cannot visit them due to COVID, so I become their family because I am the only person around to comfort them and hold their hand. But I can't do that for my patients when I have more patients to see than I can possibly care for properly in one shift. Many of these patients are people to whom I have provided care for years. It makes me sad to see them suffer because of COVID itself, and the social isolation the pandemic has caused them.

At work, there is never enough PPE provided to us. I had to use my mask for one whole month before they would replace it for me. That means the mask I am wearing is not working as well as it could because masks are not supposed to be reused for that long. We don't get hazard pay for the extra work and the risk we are taking on. They also don't give us pandemic sick days, which means people have to use vacation days or take unpaid days off and even some are forced to file Workers Compensation. The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act would address all of these problems which will make us safer in the short term, and will help retain our staff in the long term. Please vote yes on this bill so healthcare workers and all essential workers can truly be treated like the heroes we really are! Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cyntira Gilchrist
Baltimore County Resident
1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Member