

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee; Maryland State Senate

FROM: Jake Burdett, jakeburdett11@gmail.com, 443-833-5051

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RE: Senate Bill 486: Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency

(Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)

POSITION: In Favor

My name is Jake Burdett, and while I am the President of the Columbia Democratic Club in Howard County, as well as a member of the Indivisible Howard County Economic Equity Team, both of which support this bill, I'm submitting testimony today more from my perspective as a **non-unionized Amazon warehouse worker**, and ask that members of the Committee vote in favor of HB0581 - the Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act .

When most people hear the phrase “essential frontline workers”, they tend to picture medical professionals, grocery store workers, trade jobs, and other unionized fields. While all of those jobs are vital to keeping society functioning during a pandemic, people often forget about warehouse workers, who serve just as important of a role in keeping the economy and society running, and are also put in grave danger simply by showing up for work. Sadly at Amazon, unlike all of those other industries mentioned, **we do not have a union, meaning we have no one to collectively bargain on our behalf and fight for better working conditions and pay. This means we have to rely on our state legislators to step in and protect us, which is one of the fundamental responsibilities of government. Amazon is concerned with maximizing profit moreso than they are about making sure their employees receive adequate payment during a crisis, so they will not voluntarily pay hazard pay - they must be *mandated* to do it by state legislation.**

At my Amazon warehouse in Baltimore, I work most shifts with 230 other frontline essential workers, all crammed together in one single building - it's no wonder then why we get a notification about once a week of a new co-worker getting COVID. None of us *want* to be in an area with hundreds of other people during a deadly viral outbreak - we have to be, because our job requires us to be.

While much of the economy is struggling during COVID, and many businesses have been forced to close down, it's actually been quite the opposite for Amazon: business has been BOOMING! With more people afraid to shop in person now because of COVID, online shopping on Amazon is higher than ever! Despite massive profits in large part due to the circumstances COVID has created, Amazon has *still* opted NOT to pay their employees hazard pay! Amazon did pay their employees hazard pay at the beginning of the crisis in March and April of 2020, but the pandemic has only gotten MUCH worse since then, yet Amazon has opted not to continue paying their employees hazard pay. **This is in large part because we have no union to**

negotiate on our behalf, and recent efforts to unionize in other Amazon factories across the country have been met with massive resistance from Amazon.

Although Jeff Bezos recently left his role as Amazon CEO, he is still Executive Chairman, and in the 3 minutes I have to give this testimony, Jeff Bezos will make over \$450,000, so Amazon can definitely afford the hazard pay. Without warehouse workers, Amazon's business model would fail. Without Amazon warehouse workers, people wouldn't be able to receive their medicine, groceries, holiday gifts, etc.

While I'm speaking from my personal experience as an Amazon warehouse worker, this is just as true for ALL essential workers - **union and non-union alike**. If essential workers truly are essential, we need to start paying them hazard pay like they are, **and the only way for non-unionized essential workers to receive this is through strong state legislation**. Please support HB0581 with mandatory \$3/hour hazard pay included.