



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

My name is Tyrhonda Allen. I live in Baltimore and have three sons, all under the age of 20. For the past three years I have worked in the environmental services department at a long-term care facility in Baltimore.

I'm offering this testimony so you will understand just how much the COVID pandemic has affected my life and the lives of so many essential workers.

COVID hit our facility hard. We lost some residents and one of our staff, a strong man in the prime of his life, died. It was heartbreaking and I thought about quitting.

But I stayed because I needed to support my kids. It was extremely scary to go to work every day, not knowing if you're going to bring the virus home with you. When I got home after each shift, I would take off my clothes outside to reduce the chance of bringing the virus in with me.

I didn't talk to my sons about the COVID cases at the facility; I didn't want to scare them, but I have lived with this anxiety every day the last 10 months.

At the beginning of the outbreak, our facility did not provide us with enough masks or gowns until our union, 1199SEIU, stepped in to demand better treatment.

Many of our staff have left, especially nurses, who couldn't handle the stress and conditions, which has put more of a burden on those of us who stayed on board. All of these factors have made my job so much harder to do.

Despite the added pressure and risk, I received hazard pay for only two weeks of work during the 10 months we've been dealing with COVID.

It's not fair to treat essential workers this way – demanding they come to work with COVID patients but not compensating them for the new pressure and danger.

I beg you to pass the Essential Workers Protection Act to require long-term care facilities and other health care facilities to mandate hazard pay, paid leave and mental health days for frontline workers. We also must require employers to do what needs to be done to protect workers, whether it's equipment or better safety procedures.

Please show your support for me and all essential workers in the state and pass this legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Tyrhonda Allen
Member, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East