

Arielle Juberg  
Baltimore, Maryland  
District 8

Testimony in Support of Bill SB0486, Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)

To: Chair Kelley and members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Arielle Juberg

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice in Baltimore and CASA de Maryland's Ally Network. I am a church member, volunteer, and patron of businesses in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

I am testifying in support of SB0486, Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act). My family and I are safe and well today because of essential workers. When a family member became sick and fainted last year, our local EMT crew and emergency department staff came to our aid. We have been visiting grocery stores and drug stores each week for food, toiletries, and medicine. A senior care facility is cooking and cleaning for my elderly family member. I am sure that many of your families have also depended upon these types of services.

Essential workers have put their health and safety at risk to serve their communities. According to the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, across the country, at least 28,700 grocery store employees have been infected with or exposed to the virus and 134 have died from COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this is happening in Maryland. In December, I visited a local grocery store where employees had made a small memorial to a colleague who passed away. This legislation guarantees safe working conditions, hazard pay, and access to testing and paid sick leave. As a community, we should absolutely thank essential workers for their services during this catastrophic time. However, saying "thank you" isn't enough. This bill is so important because too many essential workers did not and do not have access to safe working conditions.

SB0486 is the right thing for essential workers and their families. It is also the right thing for Maryland. This pandemic has shown us that we are *all* connected, and that any weakness in our system that touches one person will impact us all.

Maryland has taken important steps to protect essential workers, including prioritizing them for vaccination and requiring masks in stores. I am asking this committee to send a clear message that we will protect and honor essential workers. For all these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report for SB0486.

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<sup>1</sup> Maheshwari, Sapna and Corkery, Michael. "'We Are Forgotten': Grocery Workers Hope for Higher Pay and Vaccinations". The New York Times. February 8, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/08/business/grocery-workers-hero-pay-vaccines.html?smid=url-share>