

Testimony of Anthony Powell in SUPPORT of SB486: Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act

My name is Anthony Powell. I live in LaPlata and work as an Emergency Medical Technician at Prince George's Hospital Center in Cheverly.

It's important for you to understand what it's been like for those of us who have been working in hospitals during the COVID crisis.

In the emergency department where I work, we have seen a dramatic increase in patient loads, including a surge in cases of people testing positive for the coronavirus. This included many cases of people who were experiencing behavioral health episodes and were positive for the virus. I was often put in risky situation of having to restrain these combative Covid-positive patients.

As the first wave hit last spring, we did not have the protective gear we needed. Masks were hard to come by and we would have to use the same mask day after day – and these were disposable masks that are supposed to be used only once.

The stress of dealing with the much higher patient load and so many Covid cases has been enormous. It's been mentally and physical tragic to the staff as we saw firsthand the impact the virus is having on the older population and so many others.

More staffers are missing time from work due to the stress. Some don't feel safe and others have had to quarantine. There are often fewer of us working at a time when there are more patients to care for. And I have not received any kind of hazard pay to compensate for the added workload and risk.

I was a Marine and saw combat duty in the Middle East, so I pride myself on handling the extra stress I have experienced these past 10 months. But many of my coworkers are so scared. They worry about getting the virus or taking it home to their kids.

We are asking a lot of our frontline workers, so we must make sure that health care workers and all essential workers have safe jobs. And we should pay people for taking the extra risks to serve the community during an emergency.

I strongly urge you to back our essential workers, who have been on the frontlines of this battle every day. Please support the Essential Workers' Protection Act.

Thank you.