

Testimony of the Alzheimer's Association Greater Maryland and National Capital Area Chapters  
**SB 486 - Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency**  
**Position: Favorable**

Chairwoman Kelley and Vice Chair Feldman

My name is Eric Colchamiro, and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Alzheimer's Association in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 486, legislation which establishes numerous benefits and protections for essential workers, as defined by the bill, during an emergency, and related responsibilities for each employer of an essential worker

The Alzheimer's Association is tremendously concerned with the state of our direct care workforce. For our patient population, individuals living with dementia—95 percent of them have at least one other chronic condition—care is complicated. Along with the importance of being adequately trained in dementia, we are concerned about the high turnover, low pay, and few opportunities for advancement which make filling direct care positions difficult. By 2030, 3.4 million more direct care workers will be needed — a 48 percent increase from 2015.

This bill has many important provisions; we particularly appreciate the requirements that:

- An essential worker who earns less than \$100,000 per year shall earn hazard pay for each pay period the essential worker works during an emergency;
- An employer must provide an essential worker with at least 3 days of paid bereavement leave and at least 14 days of paid health leave for use during an emergency, as specified; and

For individuals with dementia and their families, and the essential workforce that serves them, this bill is critical. This workforce—for home care providers, for long-term care providers, and more—gains not only a small per-hour salary bump and other modest additional protections, they gain an added level of respect for the extraordinary work they do.

The status quo, particularly during a global pandemic—where many direct care workers rely on public assistance to survive—results in workers leaving these positions because, while essential, they cannot afford to remain in these jobs. The modest added protections this bill affords this workforce could lead to increased job satisfaction and retention, but can also increase the quality of care for those with dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association thanks SEIU for their leadership on this issue, and thank Senator Augustine—a member of the Maryland State Alzheimer's Council—for his sponsorship of such an important issue. We urge a favorable report.