

Written Testimony from Pat Downie
HB 892 – State Prescription Drug Benefits – Retirees
Before the House Appropriations Committee
March 15, 2022
SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Chair McIntosh and members of the House Appropriations Committee. My name is Pat Downie. I am a state employee with the Department of the Environment. I am an Environmental Compliance Specialist, and have worked for the State of Maryland for approximately 4 years.

I am also a member of MPEC, Maryland Professional Employees Council, the labor union for state employees classified in unit G. I am here before you today to call for a favorable report to HB 892, the bill that would renew the state's promise to its workers who started employment before 2011 by re-instituting the state employee retiree prescription drug program.

Members of the committee, I am an accredited Lead Risk Assessor and I have the privilege of reaching out to Maryland families who have children that are dealing with lead poisoning. Lead poisoning is a silent killer but when caught in early stages is easy to reverse, however continued exposure can permanently damage a person's ability to learn, increasing aggressive behavior and creates a 70% increase in disease as the population ages.

Prior to COVID lead poisoning was reputed to be the "largest mass poisoning in human history". It has been called the "Crime of the Century". Lead exposure in early years increases behaviors such as: low functioning, hyperactive, impulsive, and distractible. Eliminating lead poisoning would reduce cases of ADHD in the US by 800,000 per year.

What most individuals do not realize is the impact of lead poisoning as a person ages. Adults that were affected as children have higher risk of cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, stroke and kidney disease. It is easy to say with Maryland's large stock of older homes that state retirees not only need but deserve to have the health care they were promised. Health benefits are needed by this generation more so than any other.

Just before the outbreak of COVID, Gov Hogan realized there was an issue with state employees not being able to retire in the very state they protected and supported for years. Gov Hogan was proposing tax breaks to help keep retired state employees from leaving. These are the very generations that are struggling with high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and mental health issues. These retiree's need prescription coverage more due to lead exposure as children.

I believe that the billions of \$'s of budget surplus was stripped from the very backs of State Employees. Not only have state employees been deprived of generational wealth in lack of competitive pay raises & pay compression issues but now are also significantly impacted by the very environmental hazards they protect other generations from.

Maryland is in the top 3 wealthiest states in the US and yet it does not fairly treat employees that sacrifice salary and health to protect Marylanders and now they are being robbed of health benefits that have been promised to them for years.

Maryland state employees have been reduced every year that Gov Hogan has been in office. We are struggling to enforce oversight processes without enough qualified workers. Seeing that promises are not kept, cost of living and regular pay raises are not guaranteed impacts the state's ability to maintain a stable workforce. Hiring is a revolving door with less qualified and significantly marginalized employees who do stay. There is no future, no pay and no health benefit guarantees.

Enacting HB 892 shows the people working for the state of Maryland that promises made are promises kept. It also demonstrates the respect, value and worth of state workers. We develop and support the actions and values that make this state one of the top 3 wealthiest states in the country.

Again, I call for this committee to issue a favorable report to HB 892. Thank you.