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Patrick Moran - President

Testimony
SB 10 – Workers' Compensation - COVID-19 Occupational Disease Presumption
Finance
March 8, 2022
Support with Amendment

AFSCME Council 3 strongly supports SB 10. This legislation would establish that first responders, public safety employees, and health care workers are presumed to have an occupational disease that is compensable under workers' compensation law after a positive test or diagnosis for COVID-19. It would be retroactive to the beginning of the pandemic, covering claims put forward on or after March 1, 2020. The bill would expire July 31, 2023.

We have never dealt with a challenge like COVID-19 before. Frontline employees across Maryland fearlessly continued reporting to work even through shortages of PPE and information. And because of their work, Maryland has limited community transmission out of our public congregate care facilities.

This has been done while having to surmount seemingly endless obstacles put before us:

- A lack of personal protective equipment;
- A lack of planning and safety protocols that led to wildly divergent responses to outbreaks from facility to facility, and campus to campus. To this day AFSCME has been unable to bring the University System of Maryland to the table to negotiate health and safety protocols for a virus that cares not whether you're a Terrapin or a Retriever;
- But I would be remiss if I didn't point out that Maryland's chronic understaffing of its facilities made a bad situation worse.

All of this has come with a horrible cost: thousands of state employees have contracted the virus while continuing to serve Marylanders, particularly those in crisis. And to date, we are *aware* of over a dozen deaths in the Division of Corrections, the Department of Health, the Department of Transportation and within the campuses of the University System. At least two just this year.

We applaud Senator Jackson and the other General Assembly members who have championed workers' compensation eligibility for those stricken by the pandemic. The long-term effects of COVID-19 are still being discovered, and we are still learning of these effects. But have no doubt, "long COVID" is real, and because of this we would ask that the expiration date of the legislation be removed.

We thank you, and strongly urge a favorable report of SB 10 with amendment.

Every AFSCME Maryland State and University contract guarantees a right to union representation.
An employee has the right to a union representative if requested by the employee.
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