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Philadelphia, PA 19143

February 8, 2023

Finance Committee
% Senator Arthur Ellis
James Senate Office Building, Room 301
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

To the Finance Committee:

Re: Senate Bill 214, Employment - Harassment and Intimidation - Reporting (Workplace Psychological Safety Act)

As the director of volunteers and partnerships at End Workplace Abuse (EWA), a volunteer-led and volunteer-driven corps of advocates for psychological safety in the workplace, I commend your effort to pass legislation supporting psychological safety for workers employed by public agencies in Maryland.

Workplace bullying cases are grounded in implicit bias. Bullies typically target women, people of color, the disabled, members of the LGBTQ community, and the oldest and youngest members of our workforce – individuals whose identities do not align with society's power norms. However, our laws have not protected these workers, and they face many hurdles in seeking justice, including the impossible burden of proving intent. Proof of intent is a legal mechanism that makes our discrimination statutes virtually useless. Another obstacle is that the EEOC and state commissions investigating discrimination are severely under-resourced and overburdened.

I commend the proposed bill for explicitly addressing discrimination and taking an expansive approach to people who suffer from prejudice, adding physical attributes and socio-economic status, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity (when LGBTQ citizens do not have full protections nationally). I also applaud the bill for eschewing proof of intent and for attempting to provide a more accessible way for workers to report issues on the job. Last, I support your focus on public agencies which are rife with workplace bullying. Paradoxically, workplace bullying happens at a higher rate in organizations whose missions focus on serving the greater good. These encompass government, as well as nonprofits and institutions in education, health, and human services. Workers bullied in these organizations suffer even more psychological damage as a result of the gap between purported ideals and the grim reality of abuse at work.

By establishing a more systematic reporting process for workplace bullying, SB 214 provides a good foundation for further measures to protect public workers, measures that, in the future, might include ways to prevent and stop harm. Currently, there are no laws preventing workers from psychological abuse, and nearly 50 million workers, or 30% of our workforce, are estimated to suffer from this abuse.

I am hopeful that SB214 can help pave the way for comprehensive protections that will protect a wider swathe of American workers and thank you for striving to establish psychological well-being as a right that is protected by law.

Sincerely,

R. Mimi Iijima
Volunteers & Partnerships
End Workplace Abuse/Workplace Psychological Safety Act