

Wage Standards, Sufficient Medicaid Rates Would Strengthen Nursing Facility Care in Maryland

Position Statement in Support of Senate Bill 328

Given before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Maryland's budget is a moral document that has the power to move us toward broadly shared prosperity if invested wisely, and just as much power to move us in the wrong direction if not. Investing Marylanders' shared resources in decent jobs that pay a family-supporting wage is vital to support a healthy, equitable economy. **Senate Bill 328 would advance these goals while strengthening our long-term care workforce.** For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports Senate Bill 328.

Long-term care workers are a vital part of the social infrastructure that keeps Maryland going. They provide essential services to aging Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities, but the state struggles to meet the need for these workers.ⁱ Demographic change is expected to worsen this shortfall in coming years and decades. Maryland's 65+ population grew by 18% from 2015 to 2021, while the 20–64 population increased by only 0.2%.ⁱⁱ By 2030, our 65+ population is projected to grow by another 29% as the 20–64 population slightly declines.ⁱⁱⁱ Paltry wages and dangerous working conditions are an important contributor to this worker shortage,^{iv} and disproportionately harm women of color, who constitute the bulk of this workforce:^v

- 79% of direct care workers in nursing homes in Maryland are Black and 86% are workers of color, as of 2021.
- 93% of direct care workers in nursing homes in Maryland are women.
- 37% of direct care workers in nursing homes in Maryland were born outside the United States.

Senate Bill 328 would strengthen Maryland's long-term care workforce by requiring 8% annual increases in Medicaid reimbursement rates for nursing home care in fiscal years 2026 to 2028 and requiring that facilities pass through 75% of the required rate increase to care workers.

Strengthening protections to ensure workers are paid livable wages would directly benefit workers and would also reduce barriers to maintaining a sufficient long-term care workforce to provide essential supports to aging Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee make a favorable report on Senate Bill 328.

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 328

Bill summary

Senate Bill 328 would require 8% annual increases in Medicaid reimbursement rates for nursing home care in fiscal years 2026 to 2028 and require that facilities pass through 75% of the required rate increase to care workers.

Background

Long-term care workers provide essential services to aging Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities, but the state struggles to meet the need for these workers. Demographic change is expected to worsen this shortfall in coming years and decades. Research links this shortage in large part to low wages and dangerous working conditions.^{vi}

Equity Implications

Senate Bill 328 would strengthen protections for nursing home workers who face dangerous working conditions, often take home low wages, and are disproportionately women of color.^{vii}

- 79% of direct care workers in nursing homes in Maryland are Black and 86% are workers of color, as of 2021.
- 93% of direct care workers in nursing homes in Maryland are women.
- 37% of direct care workers in nursing homes in Maryland were born outside the United States.

Impact

Senate Bill 328 would likely **improve racial, gender, and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ “The Direct Services Workforce in Long-Term Services and Supports in Maryland and the District of Columbia,” PHI, 2018, <https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DSWorkers-Maryland-2018-PHI.pdf>

ⁱⁱ MDCEP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates.

ⁱⁱⁱ MDCEP analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates and Maryland Department of Planning population projections.

^{iv} “The Direct Services Workforce,” 2018.

^v PHI Workforce Data Center, <https://www.phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/>

^{vi} “The Direct Services Workforce,” 2018

^{vii} “The Direct Services Workforce,” 2018