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**SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 328**  
**Funding for Wages and Benefits for Nursing Home Workers**  
**Budget and Taxation Committee**

**January 24, 2024**  
**FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. My name is Rebecca Spiro, and I am a member of the graduate student coalition Social Work Advocates for Social Change at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. I am also a former geriatric caregiver. **I write in strong support of SB 328 Funding for Wage and Benefits for Nursing Home Workers, which would increase wages of health care workers, strengthen our health care staffing infrastructure, and promote equity.**

SB 328 requires an 8% reimbursement rate increase in the Governor's proposed budget for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in fiscal years 2026, 2027, and 2028 – 75% of which is required to fund wages and benefits for workers and staff providing direct care, indirect care, direct care support services, and other patient care to nursing home residents.

I was a nursing assistant in a skilled nursing facility in Maryland during the COVID-19 pandemic and saw firsthand the impact of our state's staffing shortfalls.<sup>1</sup> I am one of many direct care workers that provided daily essential support to individuals with long-term and complex medical conditions for \$15.10/hour. Due to low wages, it was common for us to work with dangerous staff shortages. I am grateful for Senator Rosapepe's leadership, for **SB 328 would address our nursing home staffing crisis at its source by fairly compensating direct care work.**

I remember taking long shifts with overwhelming workloads, doing painful two-person lifts by myself, and putting myself in danger because of frequent staffing shortages. In April 2020, I returned to work while COVID-positive, only four days after testing, because we were understaffed on a COVID-positive wing. When our facility had no PPE to provide us, my colleagues teamed up to buy paint suits with our own money because of our dedication to care and safety. **It is time for Maryland to take care of the people that are taking care of its own.**

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<sup>1</sup> Heiks C, Sabine N. Long Term Care and Skilled Nursing Facilities. *Dela J Public Health*. 2022 Dec 31;8(5):144-149. doi: 10.32481/djph.2022.12.032. PMID: 36751604; PMCID: PMC9894029.

**Without action like SB 328, the current staffing shortfall will only get worse.** We need well-staffed nursing homes to meet the needs of our aging population, and the need to protect this sector of the workforce is only growing. By 2035, demand for RNs is expected to grow by 50% in Maryland nursing homes, alongside demand for direct care workers.<sup>2</sup> We need to plan for fair compensation now if we are to have the workforce that our aging loved ones require.

**SB 328 helps ensure that those who care for Maryland's most vulnerable are also able to care for themselves.** If we expect nursing home workers to provide good care to our parents and grandparents every day, they need compensation that allows them to take care of their families, too. It is shameful that the average wage for a certified nursing assistant in Maryland is \$35,000.<sup>3</sup> I personally saw skilled, passionate colleagues leave the profession because of low pay and understaffing, and even more care workers frustrated by the level of care we were able to provide.

**SB 328 promotes equity and justice, for direct care workers are disproportionately made up of Black women and immigrants.** Seventy six percent of direct care workers in Maryland are Black, and 81% are workers of color. Almost nine of 10 (88%) direct care workers in Maryland are women, and one third (32%) were born outside of the United States.<sup>4</sup> This bill confronts longstanding racial and gender inequities that trap Marylanders in poverty and make it impossible to attract new workers to this field.

By increasing the wages of care workers in nursing homes, SB 328 creates both a stronger nursing home workforce and a fairer economy in Maryland. **I urge you to issue a favorable report for SB 328.**

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<sup>2</sup> Task Force on Maryland's Future Health Workforce. (August 2022). 2022 State of Maryland's Health Care Workforce Report. Maryland Hospital Association. <https://www.mhaonline.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2022-state-of-maryland-s-health-care-workforce-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> May 2022 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Maryland (2022) Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_md.htm#31-0000](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_md.htm#31-0000)

<sup>4</sup> PHI. (2018). The Direct Services Workforce in Long-Term Services and Supports in Maryland and the District of Columbia. <https://www.phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DSWorkers-Maryland-2018-PHI.pdf>