



## Testimony on HB485

Public Health - Prohibition on Transfer of Human Immunodeficiency Virus – Repeal

Position: **FAV**

To Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Ricarra Jones and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation, with 10,000 members in Maryland. We represent members who work at Community Based Organizations that provide HIV testing and treatment. Our union supports the campaign to decriminalize HIV and urges a favorable report on HB485.

Maryland's current law <sup>1</sup> allowing people with HIV to be fined or imprisoned due to their HIV status is dangerous for public health because it dissuades people from seeking HIV testing and pursuing treatment. Healthcare workers know that testing and treatment is vital to ending the HIV epidemic.

Furthermore, Marylanders living with HIV can face legal consequences for engaging in behaviors that cannot result in HIV transmission, or even be charged without evidence of transmission. The state's law is outdated and does not consider the availability of medication that renders HIV undetectable. People using these drugs cannot transmit HIV. But even a person who uses medication, shares their status with partners, or uses a condom can be charged under current law.

HIV is the only disease that is targeted with enhanced criminal punishment under the law, which reinforces the stigma that people living with HIV face due to outdated scientific and medical beliefs. Repealing § 18-601.1 from the MD Code will encourage residents to get tested and seek treatment, allowing the state to meet its public health goals and make a meaningful step towards ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We urge a favorable report on HB485.

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<sup>1</sup> MD Code, Health-Gen §18-601.1

