



Testimony on SB356

Public Health - Prohibition on Transfer of Human Immunodeficiency Virus – Repeal Position: **FAV**

To Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings 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 and Washington, DC. We represent members who work at federally qualified health centers that provide HIV testing and treatment. Our union urges a favorable report on SB356.

Maryland's current law ¹ authorizing the imposition of fines and imprisonment as punishment for individuals with HIV is a detriment to public health. The existence of these penalties dissuades people from seeking HIV testing and treatment, which are vital to ending the HIV epidemic.

Furthermore, Marylanders with HIV can face legal consequences for engaging in behaviors that cannot result in HIV transmission and be charged without evidence of transmission. The state's law is outdated and does not consider the availability of medication that renders HIV undetectable, and therefore not transmittable. Nonetheless, a person who uses medication, shares their status with partners, or uses a condom can be charged under current law. It's time to modernize the law and destigmatize HIV.

HIV is the only disease that is targeted with enhanced criminal punishment under the law, which reinforces the stigma that people with HIV face due to outdated scientific and medical beliefs.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 SB356.

Sincerely,
Ricarra Jones, ricarra.jones@1199.org

¹ MD Code, Health-Gen §18-601.1