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HB880 - Maryland Healthy Working Families Act - Family Member – Definition

Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee, I am here today to urge you to support HB880 which would provide security to those who have willingly stepped up to care for those who are not able to care for themselves. What HB880 does is address the question: Who cares for those who cannot care for themselves when that person has no family to care for them?

I'd like you to meet Tom Mills, a constituent of mine. Tom is 81 years old and was diagnosed as a child to be of limited intellectual ability. Although Tom reads at the 2nd grade level he is quite handy even at age 81.

I'd also like you to meet Ed Johnson. Ed is a retired firefighter who, while stationed at Dulles Airport, was a responder at the Pentagon on 9/11. As a younger man, Ed's best friend was Tom's younger brother, who cared for Tom after their parents died. Tom's brother died unexpectedly and Tom had no one to care for him. So 20 years ago, Ed Johnson took legal responsibility for Tom, and as a representative of the court, he is legally required to provide for Tom's care.

In 2018, Tom was diagnosed with cancer. Unable to drive, or make medical decisions for himself, he needed someone to get him to his medical appointments and see to his care after surgery. Ed is sole proprietor of a small business and cannot always take time off work from his business to get Tom to his appointments, so, like any family, Tom's wife assisted in Tom's care.

I'd like you to meet Sue Johnson, an EMT/ volunteer firefighter, little league coach, a college professor, and Ed's wife. As a college professor, Sue does not get annual leave or personal leave. She earns only sick leave. Her employer's interpretations of current law did not permit Sue to use her sick leave to care for Tom during his treatment and recovery from cancer.

Which brings us to the next question HB880 is asking: What is a family?

Paul R. Amato, President of the National Council on Family Relations writes, "A perusal of family textbooks reveals that many authors also have struggled with this question. Presumably, the teachers who use these textbooks also have struggled." The U.S. Census Bureau defines that "a family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together."

I'd like you to meet Matt. Tom has been in Matt's life since the moment of Matt's birth. Matt has never known a time when Tom was not in his life. Ed, Sue, Matt, and Tom all live together, as a family, on their farm in Jefferson, Maryland.

What HB880 asks is to recognize the family you see before you as a family. And let them care for one another as families do.

Respectfully,
Delegate Kenneth P. Kerr
District 3B – Frederick County