

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HOUSE BILL 880:
Maryland Healthy Working Families Act - Family Member - Definition

TO: Chairman Derrick E. Davis, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: February 25, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support House Bill 880 as a means of protecting a wider range of family member candidates covered under the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act.

On February 1, 2018, over 700,000 Marylanders began to accrue earned sick and safe leave under the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act (HB 1 of 2017) after a long six (6) year fight. This long fight involved much negotiation and compromise to make sure that both businesses and workers are considered equitably when it comes to earned sick and safe leave. However, when it comes to earned sick leave, state-by-state we know that working families are the most vulnerable. No one should have to choose between their health and their job, yet an absence or delay of earned sick leave makes this choice ever-present for working families. Most importantly though, the absence or delay of earned sick leave means the increasing pressure and fear of losing income, which for a low-wage working family can ultimately mean the loss of stability on a variety of levels: family, economic, health, and more.

Under current law, The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act covers a very specific subset of possible “family members”. The list is as follows: a biological child, an adopted child, a foster child, or a stepchild of the employee; a child for whom the employee has legal or physical custody or guardianship; a child for whom the employee stands in place of the parents, regardless of the child’s age; a biological parent, an adoptive parent, a foster parent, or a stepparent of the employee or of the employee’s spouse; the legal guardian of the employee; an individual who acted as a parent or stood in place of the parents to the employee or the employee’s spouse when the employee or the employee’s spouse was a minor; the spouse of the employee; a biological grandparent, an adopted grandparent, a foster grandparent, or a step-grandparent of the employee; biological grandchild, an adopted grandchild, a foster grandchild, or a stepgrandchild of the employee; or a biological sibling, an adopted sibling, a foster sibling, or a stepsibling of the employee.

This legislation would simply add a Ward of the State who acts as the legal guardian for an individual or the individual’s spouse to the list of family members. For some individuals, the ward is the only family that they have and ought to have the coverage of the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act like other acknowledged members. For this reason, JOTF requests a favorable report on House Bill 880.