



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 1021

Labor and Employment - Maryland Healthy Working Families Act – Seasonal Temporary Workers

House Economic Matters Committee

February 25, 2020

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
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Health Care for the Homeless
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Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly opposes HB 1021, which increases the period - from the first 106 days to the first 120 days of employment - during which an employer is not required to allow an employee to use earned sick and safe leave, and also shortens the period from 37 weeks to 32 weeks during which a rehired employee must have their unused earned sick and safe leave reinstated.

As of February 11, 2018, more than 700,000 Maryland workers now have access to earned sick leave - and we should not go backwards. Nearly four in ten private-sector workers – and 80% of low-wage workers – were previously unable to earn a single sick day to recover from common, short-term illnesses. Families that are already living in or near poverty can least afford to lose income due to illness, yet half of Maryland workers earning less than \$35,000 couldn't earn sick days in Maryland prior to February 2018. For our most vulnerable neighbors, just a few days of lost pay is often equivalent to an entire month's grocery budget or rent payment, thus rolling back the Healthy Working Families Act could be financially catastrophic for low-income Marylanders.

Even seemingly “minor” changes to the Healthy Working Families Act – like HB 1021 - could negatively impact our state's workers, families, and the health of our communities. In particular, HB 1021 would roll back negotiations that were agreed to regarding when earned sick leave can be utilized without additional hurdles for Maryland workers. The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act was introduced at 90 days before employees could utilize their leave, opposition wanted 120 days, and 106 days was agreed to by both sides as a compromise. The majority of states and jurisdictions that have enacted earned sick and safe leave laws only have 90 days probationary periods – making Maryland already an outlier by requiring 106 days. We should not move backwards by further extending probationary periods for low-wage workers. The current law reflects a reasonable balance and negotiation on the length of probationary periods and reinstatement of leave between rehires.

Access to earned sick leave provides economic security for working Marylanders, and ultimately creates the stability necessary for low-income families to move out of poverty. Changing access to earned sick leave before we've had time to analyze its impact is short-sighted and potentially detrimental. Maryland workers have waited years for access to earned sick leave, and should not bear the burdens of harmful new exemptions and changes.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges an unfavorable report on HB 1021.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.