

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 712
“Family Bereavement Act”

Greetings. I am Jayneen Jones, MS, NCC. I currently serve as the Bereavement Coordinator for Holy Cross Home Care & Hospice Bereavement Center. My specialized bereavement services include educating and counseling individuals who have experienced loss. I provide these critical services to our patients and their families as well as those in our community.

Working in this field for twenty years and witnessing the impact of those who have lost loved ones, it is far overdue for employers to recognize the importance and value of providing bereavement leave to employees. With the introduction of **SB260/HB712, Family Bereavement Act**, we have the potential to finally fill in a vital gap all working Marylanders have been missing.

It cannot be forgotten what is attached to every loss. Grief. Grief is on the other side of love and love can never be ignored in loss. Grief is experienced by all and it must be recognized that everyone deals with grief differently.

Grief shows itself in many ways. There is **Normative grief, Anticipatory grief, Ambiguous grief, and Complicated grief**, but there is one aspect of grief that is of the utmost importance for this body to recognize: **Disenfranchised grief**. This is the loss of a pet. This experience is misunderstood and therefore not recognized by society, but counselors everywhere understand the loss of a pet often equates to the tragic loss of a beloved family member.

Just as important as the classification, is the impact the grief has on individual employees. Those in a state of grief are in a mental fog and can experience short-term memory loss. Frequently and especially under the circumstances of a tragic accident, some never get back to

the person they used to be. They may again become functional, but in losing a loved one, they lose a part of themselves.

While the impact is a mental health issue, it also impacts the griever physically, emotionally and spiritually, and for varied amounts of time. Many will grieve anywhere from several days to several months. For others it can last for up to a couple of years, but unfortunately, for some, the grief is felt for the entirety of their life. It may be felt off and on, but it never leaves.

With the full understanding of grief, it is unrealistic and unreliable for either employer or employee to believe there is an ability to give an organization their full focus, talents, and time on the job, while in a state of grief.

Employers need employees who are mentally, emotionally and physically present and in the atmosphere of grief, this is not an option. Employees need the support of their employers to handle their battle with grief without feeling the pressure to ignore it in order to perform at work. This only leads to further problems down the road, problems which can be handled if all parties move proactively from the very start.

This bill presents the perfect opportunity for employers to continue to show how much they truly value their employees holistically and understand that including bereavement leave can only enhance the culture of their organizations.

For these reasons, I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on **SB260/HB712**.