



**Testimony in Support of SB539
Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment
Thursday, February 27, 2020**

TO: The Honorable Delores G. Kelley, Chair; The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair; and Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Laura E. Irwin, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

As advocates for the low-income community, the Montgomery County Community Action Board strongly supports SB539, which will establish a family medical leave insurance program in Maryland. Our Board has been a longtime advocate for policies and programs such as the EITC, childcare subsidies, and work supports that help people move towards self-sufficiency. We applaud the state's efforts in recent years to increase the Maryland minimum wage and to require employers with 15 or more employees to provide earned sick leave. Policy changes such as these help people find and maintain employment.

Establishing a statewide family and medical leave insurance program will provide critical support to lower-wage workers in particular because many of these workers do not earn enough, or do not earn any paid time off from work. These workers often find themselves confronted with challenging situations where they must miss work without pay due to their or their loved one's medical issue, possibly jeopardizing their employment, or continue to work during this difficult period in order to maintain a job. Our Board does not believe employees should have to make this choice. We also strongly believe that the lack of family leave in Maryland is a serious equity issue. While many higher-wage jobs offer generous benefits such as paid time off and medical insurance, lower-wage jobs often do not.¹ We also know that 31% of women here in Montgomery County, 44% of African Americans, and 54% of Hispanic residents have incomes below the Self-Sufficiency Standard.² These are many of the same workers who will benefit the most from the proposed family and medical leave insurance program.

In Montgomery County, where the cost of living is so high, the lack of family and medical leave is especially problematic. For example, the County's Self-Sufficiency Standard, which measures the actual cost of living in a given geographic location for a certain family type, is more than \$103,000 for a family of three with one working adult, one infant, and one preschooler. Finding employment that pays this very high income is incredibly difficult, especially when 18 of the 20 largest occupations in the County have incomes below this amount.³ Paid family and medical leave, along with other work supports, will help people maintain employment and help lower-wage workers receive necessary support that they do not receive from their employers.

The Community Action Board recommends that you pass SB539 and continue to explore other policies that support workers and help Marylanders move towards self-sufficiency.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs2.t06.htm>

² <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/>

³ <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/>