

**Legislative Position: Opposed**

**House Bill 581**

**Labor and Employment-Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)**

**House Economic Matters Committee**

**Friday, February 5, 2021**

Dear Chairman Davis and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce, with 575 members representing over 40,000 employees, I am writing you to oppose House Bill 581, Labor and Employment-Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act).

HB 581 would create a number of new programs and employer mandates, and resulting costs, during a declared state of emergency. These include: 1) an additional \$3/hour of hazard pay, 2) employer reimbursement of healthcare costs, 3) a new leave program for bereavement and health leave, 4) employee right to refuse work, 5) workplace safety standards, and 6) health emergency preparedness plans. Simply put, the requirements and associated costs in this bill would be devastating to Maryland's job creators, who are already struggling with a global pandemic and compounding financial implications of other state mandates like increased minimum wage and paid sick and safe leave.

Even more concerning, the definitions of "emergency," "essential employer," and "essential employee" contained within the bill are extremely broad and overly ambiguous. They go well beyond the scope of the public health emergency we are currently navigating as a result of COVID-19. Nearly every type of employer in Maryland is included in the scope of the legislation, regardless of risk profile. In fact, 15 industry sectors that contain a combined total of 76 categories as defined as essential.

We believe the definitions of "essential employer" and "essential worker" need to be narrowed and refined. Further, we believe that the definition of "essential" should be tied to a mechanism or agency that is able to periodically review and amend said definition to better reflect the circumstances of a specific situation or emergency rather than utilizing static definitions that are locked in statute.

Throughout the duration of the pandemic, our local business and nonprofits have remained committed to doing our part to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The health and safety of their employees and the general public remains our community's top priority. We look forward to working with the bill sponsors, Maryland General Assembly, and other stakeholders toward policy outcomes that balance health and safety with the operational and economic realities that Maryland job creators are managing at this time.

Delegate Davis, I was on the Maryland Chamber of Commerce's "Meet the State" call with you on January 19<sup>th</sup>. I was pleased to hear you say, and I am paraphrasing, "I am committed to listening to the business community when it comes to this year's legislation. 'We' need to listen to you." Well, I am respectfully asking you to "listen to the business community." Please hear us and seriously consider our concerns when it comes to HB 581.

On behalf of the business and nonprofit members of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce, we respectfully request an **UNFAVORABLE REPORT** on HB 581.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Frey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Frey, IOM  
President and CEO