



Voices Maryland

Committee: Economic Matters

**Testimony on: HB0581-- “Employment Standards During an Emergency
(Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)”**

Organization: Voices Maryland

Person Submitting: Sarahia Benn, Legislative Executive

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 5, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing testimony today in support of HB0581. Voices Maryland is a grassroots organization focused on State and County level legislation and policies that impacts marginalized communities and veterans affairs. Labor and employment legislation is of massive importance to these communities particularly due to how impacted these communities have been historically and currently.

Unions and Black and marginalized communities and covid: Although there has been a decline across the board in unionization rates for decades Black and Veteran workers are still more likely than workers of any other race or ethnicity or class to be unionized. With Black, Veteran, and marginalized workers being the most impacted by the covid -19 pandemic in the most disproportionate manner it is necessary we protect and fortify our labor force in Maryland.

We believe the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act helps to start the process by defining some people who work in certain key industries as “Essential workers” and provide a number of protections necessary and essential in the event of an emergency such as the Covid 19 pandemic or a State of Emergency declared by local authorities and/or pursuant to an executive order, proclamation, or declaration, due to an imminent

threat of matters which includes widespread injury, illness, property damage, or other health impacts as defined in HB0581.

Safe And Hygienic conditions For Essential Workers: During any state of emergency it is necessary to have safe and hygienic conditions and HB0581 otherwise known as “the ACT” addresses these issues. It requires that essential employers, those being employers who employ essential workers (all of which are more fully defined in 14-1101) in essential businesses provide safe and hygienic working conditions, including provisions of PPE at no cost and to create written safety and health protocols.

Additional protections: hazard pay & healthcare protections

Emergency action plan

Universal health and bereavement leave

Right to refuse dangerous work during emergency

Notification and reporting of positive results

Protections for Whistleblowers

Prohibition on misclassification

(Dedicated to Black History month)

“A **community is democratic** only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess..”

A. Phillip Randolph

Strengthen & Preserve our Labor & Employment force in Black, Veteran, and Marginalized Communities.

For these reasons we urge you to vote favorably for HB0581.