



Testimony on HB1199
Workers' Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU- the largest healthcare union in the nation, where we represent over 10,000 healthcare workers in Maryland. Due to the fact that the worksite is the number one area where COVID-19 contraction occurs(as reported by the Maryland Department of Health), we are supportive of HB1199 to ensure that Maryland's emergency services workers who contract COVID-19 are eligible for workers' compensation.

Nearly 380,000 Maryland residents have contracted COVID-19 thus far, and over 7,800 residents have lost their lives. A number of those residents who work in the emergency services, healthcare, public safety, and even childcaring industries have contracted COVID-19 such as firefighters, police officers, correctional officers, healthcare workers, and childcare workers. Under current law, workers who cannot link exposure to COVID-19 directly to their worksite activities, are often denied employer and workers' compensation claims. Many workers thus find themselves financially strained and without work for extended periods due to this systemic flaw. Therefore, this legislation is necessary to categorize COVID-19 as an occupational disease, which will give thousands of workers access to a more just compensation process under this legislation.

Our members are doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals that not only interact with the public during this pandemic, but specifically treat members of the public that are positive for COVID-19. Like our members, this bill concentrates on various workers who also interact with the public daily to care for and keep our communities safe. In this capacity, we stand with our brothers and sisters that put their lives on the line just as much as healthcare workers and believe that their daily sacrifice should be financially valued if COVID-19 contraction occurs.

For this reason, we believe that this Act will provide a financial safety net for Maryland essential workers who put their lives at risk every day and ask that you support HB765- the Essential Workers' Compensation Act. For this reason, we believe that this legislation will create financial security for emergency services workers in the event that they do contract COVID-19, to enable them to seek compensatory relief to continue to live their life without financial distress. We, therefore, ask this Committee to give HB1199 a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Ricarra Jones
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