

**Hearing Testimony February 5, 2021**  
**Economic Matters Committee**  
**Service Employees International Union, Local 500, CtW, CLC**

**House Bill 581 – Labor and Employment – Employment Standards During an Emergency**  
**(Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act)**

**SUPPORT**

SEIU Local 500 is made up of over 20,000 working people in Maryland, Washington D.C., and Virginia. Our union represents the support staff of Montgomery County Public Schools, family child care providers, adjunct faculty at several Maryland colleges and universities, staff at non-profits, and many other working people across the region. Our members have been on the front lines since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is why today we submit this testimony in favor of House Bill 581. As our state charts its post-COVID recovery, we must consider the pain and loss of essential workers have endured during this very difficult time.

The Maryland Essential Workers Protections Act will provide much-needed standards and procedures to protect the health and safety of essential workers during pandemics. If passed, this bill would require that when a State of Emergency is called, essential workers will be entitled to certain workplace protections, including the requirement that employers provide a safe and clean workspace, introduce safety protocols, and provide PPE at no cost. The essential workers in Maryland have risked their lives and the lives of their loved ones to help Maryland's economy stay afloat during this crisis. Maryland must plan to ensure their safety if we are ever in this situation again. The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act would also give employees the right to refuse dangerous work. No Marylander should be forced to unjustly risk their lives because their employer has not implemented proper precautions to ensure their safety.

Under this law, essential workers would be granted hazard pay for the risk they take on by keeping Maryland open and our healthcare system operating. Workers risking their lives would receive an additional \$3 per hour in hazard pay, in addition to their base pay. Furthermore, during a pandemic similar to COVID-19, the enrollment would remain open for the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange coverage will be available to uninsured employees.

House Bill 581 offers a fair and just solution to protect and value the essential workers that have kept us safe and kept Maryland's economy going during this very difficult time. We therefore ask for your support for HB581 and strongly urge a favorable committee report. Thank you each for your dedication to fairness and justice, and to the working people of our state – and thank you for considering our testimony.

**Service Employees International Union, Local 500, CtW, CLC**  
**12 Taft Court, Rockville, MD 20850**  
**301-740-7100    [www.seiu500.org](http://www.seiu500.org)**  
**Pia Morrison, President**