

Testimony in Support with Amendment of House Bill 581
Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency
(Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)
Economic Matters
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Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 581 which would establish the Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act that would require employers, during a state of emergency, to provide safe and hygienic working conditions for their employees, hazard pay, healthcare assistance, free testing, and provide health and bereavement leave. The Act would also require employers to develop and submit emergency action plans, as well as requiring the reporting of worksite positive test results, by industry, to the Maryland Department of Health.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA supports worker's rights, and believes that every Maryland employee should be able to work in a safe and hygienic work environment. With the contagious spread of COVID-19, it is even more imperative that employers of essential employees are held accountable for the safety of their employees, while on the job and in the workplace. It is imperative that employers be required to submit a workplace plan and guidance to inform employees of worksite procedures and resources available to employees during a state of emergency. Also, requiring employers to notify the Department of Health of positive cases and not allow infected or potentially infected workers in the workplace until safe to do so, will also help to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

We respectfully ask that the following consideration be taken in relation to this legislation.

1. We would ask that a provision be included to prohibit an employer from terminating pay and benefits upon the filing of a complaint with the commissioner. We ask this, because for there to be protection, a complaint must be filed with the commissioner. During that time,



it is essential that employees are not required to report back to unsafe work environments or fear retaliation until a determination is made by a commissioner.

We believe this consideration would strengthen the overall goal and spirit of this legislation.

MSEA requests a favorable report, including the above referenced consideration to House Bill 581.