



The National Voice for Direct-Care RNs

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Maryland General Assembly
House Economic Matters Committee
Testimony of Corey Lanham, Mid-Atlantic Collective Bargaining Director
In OPPOSITION TO HB1321
Labor and Employment – Labor Organizations – Right to Work

March 5, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Davis and members of the House Economic Matters Committee, for the opportunity to express the strong opposition of National Nurses United, the nation's largest union of registered nurses with 170,000 members, to HB1321.

My name is Corey Lanham. I am the Mid-Atlantic Collective Bargaining Director for NNU.

On behalf of our several thousand members in Maryland, National Nurses United strongly urges you to give HB1321 an unfavorable report.

This radical anti-worker, so-called "right-to-work" legislation poses a significant threat to public health and safety that would also threaten to reduce living standards for Maryland workers.

Under the deceptive facade of protecting workers' rights, this bill is nothing short of a full-scale assault on living standards for all workers that would seriously erode the ability of working people to speak out when public protections are at risk.

And this bill threatens the economic stability and future of Maryland workers. Data shows that states with "right-to-work" laws have lower wages, worse healthcare outcomes, including lower life expectancies, and higher workplace injury and death rates.

Even the promise of an improved business climate is illusory. While this kind of bill has been on the wish lists of the nation's biggest and wealthiest corporate interests for years, and pushed in state legislatures across the country, they do not benefit working people.

Dangerous legislation like this should not be moved forward here in Maryland. This legislation would prohibit collective bargaining agreements that require all employees in a unionized workplace to pay fees to support the work of the union in negotiating improvements in their pay, benefits and working conditions. Federal law already provides for exemptions.

The real goal of 'right-to-work' has nothing to do with free speech or worker rights, and everything to do with increasing employer profits and suppression of the ability of workers to act collectively to improve their conditions and advocate for the public interest. Such legislation has no place in Maryland and this bill should be given an unfavorable report.

These laws are also intended to deprive unions of the resources they need in a corporate dominated political system to participate in the electoral process and elect candidates who will stand for worker rights, not corporate profits.

In healthcare, attacking the collective rights of nurses is particularly dangerous. Through their union, registered nurses who are members of National Nurses United have far greater strength to advocate for a broad range of patient protections and serve as a public watchdog of violations of patient safety by corporate healthcare employers.

Without the protection of a union, nurses do not have protections from retaliation for speaking out about unsafe hospital and clinic conditions. This has become even more important during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. We have seen repeatedly over the past year how essential it has been for nurses to have the protection of a collective bargaining agreement. Unionized nurses have been able to speak out collectively for safe patient care, including necessary infectious disease control protocols and safe staffing levels, and ensuring that hospital staff are provided with optimal personal protective equipment. This bill would dramatically undermine the registered nurses who are working every day to save lives across Maryland and, therefore, it must be rejected.

I am a Marylander and I know that this bill puts our families, our neighbors and all Marylanders at risk. National Nurses United urges every member of the committee to do what is best for Maryland workers and their families, and those nurses care for by giving HB1321 the unfavorable report it deserves.

Nurses will never be silent in the face of attacks on their rights to advocate for their patients and for public health and safety, or their right to form unions and act collectively for their own livelihood and for safe working conditions. We ask that you join nurses in opposing this dangerous bill. Thank you for your consideration.

National Nurses United (NNU) is the largest union and professional organization of registered nurses in the country, representing more than 170,000 members, including thousands of Maryland residents. NNU works with nurses to improve patient care and working conditions at hospitals, advocate for nurses and patients, and win health care justice and quality health care for all. For more information about National Nurses United's work in Maryland, please contact Kenneth Zinn, Mid-Atlantic Regional Director, at kzinn@nationalnursesunited.org or call 240-235-2000.