

**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House of Delegates  
Before the House Economic Matters Committee  
Testimony by Christine Bartron, RN, Public Health Nurse, Treasurer Local 5102  
HB 1199 –  
Workers’ Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19  
Favorable**

Good afternoon Chair Davis and members of the House Economic Matters Committee.

My name is Christine Bartron, and I am a Public Health Registered Nurse for Baltimore County Health Department of Health. I am also the treasurer for the Federation of Public Health Nurses of Local 5102. The Federation of Public Health Nurses of Local 5102 is comprised of Public Health Nurses and Public Health Nurse Practitioners. I call on this committee to give a favorable report to HB 1199.

When the Governor issued his emergency orders last Spring citing the dangers of COVID-19, and how easy the disease is transmitted, it signaled to residents of this state just how dangerous workplaces are during our current pandemic. As a Registered Nurse caring for sick patients has always been and will continue to be my priority.

Governor Hogan issued a stay-at-home order to combat the rampant spread of the virus. He stated, “If you can telework, you should be teleworking.” The essential health workers at the Baltimore County of Health Department, had to physically report to their assignments. Many workers have underlying health conditions or live with family members who have pre-conditions that make exposure to COVID-19 more dangerous.

Numerous essential employees have contracted COVID-19 at work. Some are seriously ill in the hospital for short periods and others have long-term effects of contracting the disease. Workers who have risked their lives and health to keep us all safe and healthy, should not have an added burden of worrying how to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads if they are out of work for an extended period of time. You will hear from insurance companies and their lawyers, who have safely telecommuted from their homes during the pandemic, about the cost of workers compensation for their bottom line. But I am here to tell you the cost to the essential workers who risked their lives for them. For them, the bottom line is to eat and have shelter. As Public Health Nurses and Nurse Practitioners we have reported to work every day of the pandemic, working with minimal Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as there have been greater needs and shortages of PPE across the world. We have been exposed to COVID-19 positive patients in our clinics, COVID-19 test sites, and more recently COVID-19 Immunization sites. As a diligent nurse I have personally not seen my parents, sister, friends, or many other family members because of the worry of bringing COVID-19 home to them, knowing that if I am to become infected it was contracted from work. I personally know of one nurse I work with who has been ill for many months from complications of COVID-19 that was most likely contracted on the job. She was not provided with workers compensation because of the way the law is currently written, and instead me and other Public Health Nurses collected monies to assist her while she has been out of work.

This bill would update the state’s Workers Compensation Law and level the playing field for essential workers who catch COVID-19 in their attempt to qualify for workers compensation. This is crucial for those who provide essential services to others, and who have continued to do so in the face of a pandemic that has harmed and killed hundreds of thousand of people.

For essential workers and for those who lose the ability to earn a living thanks to contracting the disease, HB 1199 must receive a favorable report.

Members of the committee, it is patently unfair to ask that essential workers bear the burden of proof against the wealthiest of insurance companies for their COVID-19 workers compensation claims. Essential workers risk their lives every day to provide vital services to our state's residents. We owe them so much for what they have done, not add to the burden for those who do catch COVID on the job and must take time out from work due to the impact on their health from the disease. I call for a favorable report to HB 1199. Thank you.