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## Testimony of Enrique Calvo, 32BJ SEIU

### House Economic Matters Committee

February 5, 2021

Thank you, Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 581, the Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act (MEWPA).

The devastation wrought by COVID-19 on Marylanders and particularly on Maryland workers shows the need for greater protection for workers. No worker should be forced to work in an unsafe work environment, yet the need to earn an income compels many workers to put their lives at risk. Empowering workers with the right to refuse to work in an unsafe work environment will compel employers to take appropriate steps to ensure that workplaces are safe. This will benefit not only the workers, but our communities as workplace spread is reduced. Similar incentives are at work when it comes to workers taking the time off to protect their own health. Without health leave, workers are incentivized to come into work, hurting their own health and that of their coworkers. Health leave is therefore an important, perhaps even necessary, tool to stop the spread of COVID-19. Given the over 7,000 COVID-19 deaths, bereavement leave is also an important part of this bill.

Just like workplaces must have emergency exit plans, so should they have plans to deal with emergencies like COVID-19. Unfortunately, plagues have been a common occurrence throughout human history. With our increased international travel and intrusions into the animal world, they may be becoming even more common.

Our union members, as essential workers, have been working throughout this pandemic, cleaning and securing our buildings. Building service workers and all essential workers should enjoy legal protections commensurate with the esteem with which we purport to hold them in. After all, many professional workers already enjoy many of the protections provided for in this bill. It's time we actually treat essential workers as truly essential. For these reasons, I am urging you to ensure the expeditious passage of HB 581.

Sincerely,

Enrique Calvo, Political Coordinator, SEIU Local 32BJ