



HB581 -- Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act
Official Testimony
Position: **FAVORABLE**

To Chairman Davis and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

My name is Rhonda Davis. I've worked for 13 and a half years as a Dietary Cook at a Long-Term Care facility in Baltimore. Before that, I worked in hotels and country clubs, but I decided to switch to healthcare because I felt more appreciated by my patients. I cook their evening meals and make sure to meet their special dietary needs. I support the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act because I care about my patients and all the members of my union.

My job has done a good job responding to the COVID19 pandemic. They acted quickly to make sure we had good PPE, gave us hazard pay, separated us by floors, didn't make us use our sick or vacation days if we contracted COVID19, ensured we had safe rides to and from work, and stopped outside visitation 3-4 weeks before it was mandated by the state. At first, they were testing us once a week, but now we are getting tested twice a week. I and most of my coworkers have already been fully vaccinated or received at least one dose of the vaccine. **We were able to avoid a big COVID19 outbreak in our facility because we had a good emergency action plan in place, are tested regularly, and were issued quality PPE.**

Unfortunately, my story is **NOT** the norm. When I talk to my union brothers and sisters who work in other facilities, they had the opposite experience that I did. I am shocked by the horror stories they are still experiencing every day. Many of them did not receive PPE at all, and when they did, it had to be reused to the point that it was no longer protective. They didn't get safe transportation provided by their facilities. They do not get hazard pay. Testing was rarely done if at all. They have to use vacation days or take unpaid time off if they get COVID. My job has now switched to saying we have to use vacation days or unpaid time off if we get COVID too, and I don't think that is fair.

The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act will require facilities to have a pandemic Emergency Action Plan in place. My job has shown how much safer it is to work in a place that had a good plan compared to the facilities that didn't. We need to make this a law because there should not be a patchwork response to protecting workers during COVID19. Essential workers deserve PPE, hazard pay, and a concrete pandemic response action plan no matter where they work. Please pass this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Davis
Member, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East