

**Testimony of Letetia Howard in SUPPORT of HB 581: Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act**

My name is Letetia Howard. I am a registered nurse and I live in Laurel. I have been a nurse for 20 years, and the last 12 I have worked at Prince George's Hospital Center in Cheverly.

As a registered nurse on the trauma/surgical unit, I have seen it all, but nothing prepared me for what it's been like to be a frontline nurse during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first wave last spring was totally frightening. Despite the fact that we were working with COVID patients, we didn't have enough masks. Since I have been a nurse, an N95 Mask has been single use only. When you enter and exit a patient room you dispose of it. Instead, we had to wear one mask 12-13 hours( our whole shift ) for a week or more. Imagine that.

We were willing to do our jobs, but we were scared of working without proper protections. Before our shifts, we would gather in a huddle and pray. We prayed a lot. That's all we had, and it helped relieve us mentally.

But the stress hasn't gone away. More and more members of the hospital staff are calling out sick because they just can't take the pressure. That adds to the burden for others to care for much higher caseloads than we're supposed to handle.

Imagine caring for six or more sick patients at a time – by yourself – while risking getting infected with a deadly virus, and ask yourself how much you should get paid. Hazard pay is absolutely needed to help compensate those who have been going through this on the front lines the last year.

In late December I was exposed to someone with COVID and I had to quarantine. I ended up missing two weeks of work but didn't get paid for most of that time. That was a huge financial burden for me and totally unfair. If you have to miss some days for quarantine, you should get paid for that. That's just basic fairness.

People call us heroes. I'd prefer it if the state would do more to compensate us for the hazardous work we do and make sure we have the protections we need. We'll be there for you; please be there for us and support House Bill 581.

Thank you.