



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

To Chair Davis and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

My name is Kimberly E. Jones. I work at a hospital in Baltimore as a Cafeteria Associate. I have worked there for 33 years, and I'm a union member with 1199SEIU. I've done this job for as long as I have because my union coworkers are like my second family away from home, and I love advocating for my colleagues and my patients. Working during COVID19 has been challenging, to say the least. We all pray together and we are survivors, but we need help! The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act is the help we need.

At the beginning of the pandemic, me and my coworkers in Dietary were not even allowed to wear masks. I know that sounds unbelievable, and that is why I took photos of us without our masks, contrasted to people who are working in management who were given masks even though they mostly work in offices. Now, we are allowed to wear masks, but high-quality PPE is still not provided to us regularly. We are expected to bring our own cloth masks, which do not work as well as medical grade masks like N95s. It's ridiculous that my department hasn't been getting the PPE we need. We're the ones that prepare and serve food that everyone eats, so it is important that we are protected.

My coworkers and I are not receiving hazard pay. It feels like a slap in the face to take on so much extra risk at work and not have my pay reflect the sacrifices I'm making. I live from paycheck to paycheck, and I financially support my son and my granddaughter. Hazard pay would help me keep up with my mortgage payments, phone bills, and other expenses. Working during COVID19 is stressful enough without having to worry about if I am going to be able to make it to my next paycheck. Hazard pay is justice for essential workers! It will help relieve our stress, and we deserve it.

We also need paid COVID leave. One of my coworkers received the vaccine and he had some pretty bad side effects that meant he could not work. They fired him because he couldn't work! So now, a lot of my coworkers are scarred to get the vaccine, not necessarily because of the side effects themselves, but because they know they can't afford to miss a day of work if they do get side effects.

Something else management at my job is doing is moving out the union workers to other facilities and bringing in non-union temp workers as replacements. The non-union workers have even lower wages, no sick leave at all, and aren't getting good PPE either. Thankfully I am a union member and my union fights for me to get good wages and to have enough PPE, but if *all* workers in the facility don't have PPE, it is still putting the staff and patients at risk. That is why we need to make the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act the law of the land! I believe my job is bringing in temp workers as a way to oust the union, and to not spend as much on pay, PPE, and benefits for workers. That's not ok. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas once referred to a "high-tech lynching" – I'll say that this tactic by management is a "high tech erosion of union workers" that put *all* workers at risk. Please pass the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act this session. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kimberly E. Johnson
Member, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East