



COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

February 1, 2021

The Honorable Dereck E. Davis, Chair
House Economic Matters Committee
House Office Building, Room 231
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Kathleen M. Dumais, Vice Chair
House Office Building, Room 231
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter in Support of the Maryland Essential Workers Protections Act (HB 0581)

Dear Chairman Davis, Del. Dumais and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women (“Commission”). We urge a favorable report for HB 0581, the Maryland Essential Workers Protections Act. The Commission is a 15-member advisory board appointed by the County Executive to advise him, the County Council, and county, state and federal government on matters of importance to women and girls. Support for HB 0581 falls squarely within several Montgomery County Commission for Women’s strategic priorities which include supporting and increasing the financial, physical security of women in our state and promoting the health of Maryland women.

The legislation provides much-needed standards and procedures that aim to protect the health and safety of essential workers not only during the current pandemic but also during future pandemics, which is critical for all Maryland workers.

So many Marylanders have been working to provide essential services to communities throughout the state during the Covid-19 pandemic. They continue to go to work at hospitals, grocery stores, restaurants, manufacturing companies, pharmacies, and other critical work sites putting themselves and their families at risk so we can all remain safe and healthy. We need to protect these frontline workers that day in and day out exposing themselves to high-risk conditions without appropriate protective equipment, adequate safety standards, proper health care and childcare or basic job protections, leaving them susceptible to contracting contagions and other dangers at higher rate than the general public.

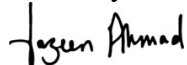
The Maryland Essential Workers Protections Act is legislation that is an important step to supporting these essential workers by providing clear guidelines to employers that will protect workers who are showing up and serving us during pandemics. The bill defines people working in certain key industries as “Essential Workers” and will require employers to provide these workers with safe and hygienic workspaces, personal protective equipment, emergency pandemic action plans that include sanitation protocol and changes in shift hours, paid health and bereavement leave, free COVID-19 testing, an additional \$3 an hour in hazard pay and the ability to refuse dangerous work without fear of retaliation.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, most essential workers in the state of Maryland come from marginalized communities, are women, and are people of color. If this bill is passed, it will allow more women and people from marginalized communities and people of color to work in safe conditions under pandemic circumstances. In action, this legislation will close many loopholes that have been exposed by this pandemic and unfortunately, have negatively impacted essential workers the most.

In the midst of the ongoing pandemic and in the event of future pandemics, the need to establish statewide standards and protocols that apply to every industry and are enforced by OSHA to protect essential workers has never been more urgent. Additionally, keeping these workers safe helps stop the spread of the virus, keeping workers’ families and all of our communities safer.

So, on behalf of the Commission, I urge a favorable report on this bill because it helps further our goal to protect women in the workplace and also ensures that all essential workers are fairly compensated for the work they do and the risks they’ve been taking during the state of emergency. Establishing emergency action plans ensures employers are never again unprepared for a major catastrophic event like Covid-19.

Sincerely,



Tazeen Ahmad
Commissioner

Montgomery County Commission for Women

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