



WASHINGTON COUNTY
FREE LIBRARY

Where People & Possibilities Meet

Legislative Position: Opposed

House Bill 581

Labor and Employment-Employment Standards during an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)

House Economic Matters Committee

Friday, February 5, 2021

Dear Chairman Davis and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Washington County Free Library, a 501c3 in Washington County, I am writing you to oppose House Bill 581, Labor and Employment-Employment Standards during an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act).

HB 581 would create a number of new programs and employer mandates, and resulting costs, during a declared state of emergency. These include: 1) an additional \$3/hour of hazard pay, 2) employer reimbursement of healthcare costs, 3) a new leave program for bereavement and health leave, 4) employee right to refuse work, 5) workplace safety standards, and 6) health emergency preparedness plans. Simply put, the requirements and associated costs in this bill would be devastating to the non-profit community, who are already struggling with a global pandemic and compounding financial implications of other state mandates like increased minimum wage and paid sick and safe leave.

Even more concerning, the definitions of "emergency," "essential employer," and "essential employee" contained within the bill are extremely broad and overly ambiguous. They go well beyond the scope of the public health emergency we are currently navigating as a result of COVID-19. Nearly every type of employer in Maryland is included in the scope of the legislation, regardless of risk profile. In fact, 15 industry sectors that contain a combined total of 76 categories as defined as essential.

We believe the definitions of "essential employer" and "essential worker" need to be narrowed and refined. Further, we believe that the definition of "essential" should be tied to a mechanism or agency that is able to periodically review and amend said definition to better reflect the circumstances of a specific situation or emergency rather than utilizing static definitions that are locked in statute.

Throughout the duration of the pandemic, public libraries around the state have been committed to doing our part to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The health and safety of their employees and the general public remains our community's top priority. We look forward to working with the bill sponsors, Maryland General Assembly, and other stakeholders toward policy outcomes that balance health and safety with the operational and economic realities that Maryland job creators are managing at this time.

On behalf of the Washington County Free Library, I respectfully request an **UNFAVORABLE REPORT** on HB 581.

Sincerely,

Jenny Bakos, MLIS
Executive Director
Washington County Free Library