



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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**House Bill HB0581 - Labor and Employment – Employment Standards During an Emergency
(Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act)
Economic Matters Committee – February 5, 2021
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2021 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of HB0581 - Labor and Employment – Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act). This bill will protect the health and safety of essential workers during a declared State of Emergency, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Essential workers are those who cannot work remotely during an emergency (including contractors and subcontractors) and work in specified industries and employment sectors. This bill will require the employer of an essential worker to establish an emergency action plan that provides for safe and hygienic working conditions, adequate personal protective equipment, free COVID testing, hazard pay, financial assistance for unreimbursed health care costs, and health and bereavement leave, among other requirements. It will also prohibit retaliation against workers who report unsafe working conditions.

Essential workers perform work that is often underpaid and unseen – yet critical to keeping our country running and to caring for our most vulnerable citizens, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Maryland cannot effectively control the spread of COVID-19 without taking actions to limit the number of essential workers who catch and transmit the virus. Maryland currently has no uniform health and safety standards to protect its essential workers. Therefore, they often lack adequate protective gear and must work outside the home in unsafe work environments. As a result, essential workers are disproportionately exposed to COVID-19. Furthermore, low-wage essential workers are often uninsured because they cannot afford the insurance premiums, and do not have paid family and medical leave. As a result, they are less likely to seek medical help or stay home when feeling ill.

This bill is of particular interest to WDC because one in three jobs held by women has been designated as essential, and many essential workers come from marginalized communities and are people of color.

We ask for your support for HB0581 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Respectfully,

Diana Conway
President