

Dear Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of white folks working as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with CASA de Maryland. I am a resident of MD District 43. I am testifying in **support of House Bill 581**.



House Bill 581, known as the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act guarantees safe working conditions, hazard pay, the right to refuse dangerous work, access to testing, and paid sick/bereavement leave during a prolonged State of Emergency. Your support of this bill shows essential workers that we value their service.

I can speak to the dangers of these things, because my mother, who suffers from a chronic respiratory condition, works in a grocery store. Every day I wake up worried that I might get the call that she is in the hospital hooked up to a ventilator breathing her last breaths, knowing if that happened, I won't get to see her before she dies.

It is clear that like many social ills, coronavirus is especially prevalent among BIPOC due to systemic racism built into our healthcare and workforce system. Immigrant families and undocumented families, especially have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Despite working on the front lines in healthcare and other crucial service industries, they continue to be excluded from state unemployment, state healthcare, and the federal CARES Act.

The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act is critical to supporting the individuals who have kept our cities functioning during this crisis. According to the Baltimore Sun, "Jennifer Chase, a Metrobus operator, said she had just learned that she'd been exposed to someone at work who tested positive for the coronavirus. She needed to arrange for testing and then find and pay for a hotel room to stay in, out of concern she might expose an older relative at home. 'We put our life on the line day-in and day-out with exposure to this deadly virus,' she said.'" Baltimore Sun, Dec. 8, 2020, Unions, advocates push for more protections in Maryland for essential workers. Further, a May 2020 complaint filed with the Maryland Occupational Health & Safety against a Maryland company by the Public Justice Center "described . . . management's insufficient efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through mask use, hand hygiene, social distancing, and cleaning of the facility."

Frontline workers like Ms. Chase and those who filed the May 2020 complaint sounding the alarm at their place of work need critical workplace protections to ensure their health and safety. With over 7,000 deaths related to COVID-19 in Maryland, it is a matter of life and death. **Without policies like these, more people die.**

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **support House Bill 581**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Smeton

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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore