



Testimony on HB1002
Unemployment Insurance – Revisions and Required Study
Position: FAVORABLE

Mr. Chair and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU- the largest healthcare union in the nation, where we represent over 10,000 healthcare workers in Maryland. Given that an estimated 300,000 Marylanders are without health insurance, we support HB1002 to increase the number of insured Marylanders.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen the significant need that health insurance has on Marylanders. From the highest income earners in the State to the poor and needy, COVID-19 has infected over 373,000 Marylanders despite economic class. For some workers, they have simply died because they did not have or could not afford health insurance. For many minorities, this problem is exacerbated given the fact that many minority communities tend to suffer at great lengths from healthcare disparities like chronic diseases, food and healthcare access, mental health issues, and more.

For low-wage workers, workers that deal with health disparities, and workers who have families, becoming unemployed is one of the worst realities that can occur. Since most essential and low-wage workers are only able to afford health insurance by being employed (including the coverage of their families), becoming unemployed leads to an increase in family medical problems, costs, and even death. To combat this issue, this bill allows workers to continue to medically support themselves as well as their families despite being unemployed. Every Marylander no matter their employment status deserves the right to healthcare and this bill is a step to ensuring healthcare for all families.

For our members, the majority of whom are minorities, low-wage workers, some of which who have even lost their jobs during this pandemic, this legislation is critical to remain safe and healthy. By allowing our members and other workers the opportunity to qualify for free or low-cost health insurance, it would reduce the number of overall health disparities in the State. Consequently, this would prevent unneeded medical costs to the State, premature deaths, access to affordable prescriptions, and an overall healthier workforce.

For this reason, we believe that this legislation will create the necessary structure in place to improve overall health equity for Marylanders and ask that you support HB1002.

Respectfully,

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