



Sunrise Movement Maryland

Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB124 - “Occupational Safety and Health Standards to Protect Employees - Aerosol Transmissible Diseases and COVID-19”

Organization: Sunrise Movement Maryland

Person

Submitting: Stephen J Leas, Political Lead

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: January 28, 2021

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB124. Sunrise Movement Maryland is a coalition of seven Sunrise hubs (and growing) across the state of Maryland, including Silver Spring, Einstein, Rockville, Frederick, Howard County, McDaniel, and Baltimore. We are a youth led movement fighting for a Green New Deal that addresses the climate crisis on the scale that science demands, creates enough jobs in the green economy for all who need them, and addresses historical injustices in the process. As a climate justice movement, we know that climate, public health, labor rights, food justice, and migrant justice are interconnected. We urge the legislature to support HB124.

We depend on food and farmworkers everyday for our meals, and yet they are often marginalized as immigrants, facing poverty and dangerous working conditions. They have been excluded from vital labor laws. COVID-19 has worsened the crisis. The UN Environmental Programme has predicted that pandemics will become more common due to climate change, leaving these workers vulnerable once again to dangerous conditions, unless protections are put in place now.

Some of the conditions that meatpacking workers are unfairly expected to tolerate during this pandemic include standing shoulder to shoulder instead of social distancing, overcrowded break rooms, poor ventilation and lack of personal protective gear. Workers choose between working in unsafe conditions or while sick and losing their paychecks. Without protection they can face retaliation for being cautious about their health. The gaps in policy have broader impacts that affect us all. The lack of safeguards means outbreaks of transmissible viruses can spread rapidly beyond state lines. By passing an emergency standard, COVID-19 is less likely to spread. Permanent standards will ensure workers are immediately protected in any future pandemics.

For these reasons we urge you to vote favorably for HB124