



City Union of Baltimore

Local 800, AFT, AFL-CIO

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Antoinette Ryan-Johnson

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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland House of Delegates
Before the House Economic Matters Committee
Testimony by Antoinette Ryan-Johnson, President
City Union of Baltimore
HB 1199 –
Workers' Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19
Favorable**

Good afternoon Chair Davis and members of the House Economic Matters Committee.

My name is Antoinette Ryan-Johnson, and I am President of the City Union of Baltimore. The members of the City Union of Baltimore are employees of various agencies including the Baltimore City School System, Department of Transportation, Recreation and Parks, Baltimore City Health Department, Finance Department, Department of Public Works, Fire Department and Police Departments, amongst others. I call on this committee to give a favorable report to HB 1199.

During this pandemic, many of our members still had to report to worksites, as they are essential employees. This put our members under a tremendous amount of stress and fear of possibly contracting COVID at a worksite and not being completely covered financially if the inevitable happened because as an essential employee, they were not able to telework. Additionally, there are facilities where it has been difficult to move permanent workstations, in order to maintain the CDC recommended six feet social distancing space.

Governor Hogan issued a stay-at-home order to combat the rampant spread of the virus. He stated, "If you can telework, you should be teleworking." The essential health workers at the Baltimore City of Health Department, Fire Department 911 center, Baltimore City Police Department and Department of Public Works, to name a few, still had to physically report to their work assignments. Many of these workers have underlying health conditions or live with family members who have pre-existing conditions that make exposure to COVID-19 more dangerous.

Numerous essential employees have contracted COVID-19 at work. Some are seriously ill in the hospital for periods, some have had to be placed into rehab facilities and others have long-term effects of contracting the disease. Workers who have risked their lives and health to keep us all safe and healthy, should not have an added burden of worrying how to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads if they are out of work for an extended period of time. You will hear from insurance companies and their lawyers, who have safely telecommuted from their homes during the pandemic, about the cost of

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workers compensation for their bottom line. But I am here to tell you the cost to the essential workers who risked their lives for them. For them the bottom line is to eat and have shelter.

Members of the committee, it is patently unfair to ask that essential workers bear the burden of proof against the wealthiest of insurance companies for their COVID-19 workers compensation claims. Essential workers risk their lives everyday to provide vital services to our state's residents. We owe them so much for what they have done, not add to the burden for those who do catch COVID on the job and must take time off from work due to the impact on their health from the disease. I call for a favorable report to HB 1199. Thank you.