

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House Economic Matters Committee  
HB 581 - The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act  
February 5, 2021**

**SUPPORT**

Chair Davis and members of the committee, on behalf of the American Federation of Teachers - Maryland (AFT-Maryland), which represents more than 20,000 state, county and municipal government workers across Maryland, we urge a favorable report on HB 581.

Maryland, unlike most states, did not set basic protocols and standards for safety in the workplace to fight the pandemic, which helped cause an inexcusable spread of Covid-19, exposed countless frontline workers, and sadly in several cases, their deaths.

During the pandemic, because of the lack of a plan and equipment from the state, AFT-Maryland was forced to protect our union members by forcing their employers, on a case-by-case basis, to develop safety protocols and standards at worksites. AFT-Maryland along with AFT national, paid for and delivered to our members, the personal protective equipment (PPE) they needed that was not provided by state or their employers.

We need the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act to provide frontline workers safe and hygienic working conditions including safety protocols and standards.

It will require every employer to submit a workplace Emergency Action Plan to inform employees of worksite procedures, resources, and logistical measures that will transpire during pandemics. The plan must include PPE procedures, work hours and shifts, and teleworking capabilities. It will guarantee free testing for employees and will require employers to notify workers of any positive tests in the workplace.

These are some of the basics that are needed to fight a pandemic, protect the workers on the frontlines, and limit exposure to the public. Unfortunately, this may not be our last viral outbreak – therefore, we MUST be prepared in the future and pass the Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act, HB 581. We ask for a favorable report.

Marietta English  
President