



Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO

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HB 581 - Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)

House Economic Matters Committee

February 5, 2021

SUPPORT

Chairman Davis and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

On behalf of our 150,000 union members affiliated with the Council throughout Metropolitan Washington D.C. including Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's, and St. Mary's counties, I would like to thank Chairman Davis and the Economic Matters Committee for allowing this hearing today on this essential matter of essential worker protection that we whole-heartedly support.

For the last year, we have heard the word “essential” more than we probably ever have, and we may have heard it so much that it has lost its value. Essential workers are real people. They are healthcare workers, transit operators, grocery store workers, and school personnel. People who literally put their lives on the line day in and day out for this state and for our communities to function while we battle a pandemic.

The provisions of this bill, including hazard pay, paid leave, PPE, safe working conditions, and free testing, or not over the top and expensive requests. Quite the opposite, this is the minimum that we can provide to the people allowing society in our state to continue to function.

The Metro Washington Council represents a cross-section of front-line workers in nearly every craft. But as diverse as the crafts and people are that this bill will cover and protect, they all share one thing in common: protecting, respecting, and paying essential workers in the manner they deserve.

Here's the bottom line:

- Statewide standards and protocols that apply to every industry can stop people from dying.
- People who put their lives on the line ought to be compensated for the risk that they put themselves, their families, and our communities in day in and day out.
- Finally, we can't go another day, and lose another life in this state, knowing that we could have done more.

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This legislation is our test to see if we truly value human life and value the work that residents of Maryland do to make our communities operate, and in many cases, thrive.

The Metro Washington Council and the 150,000 workers I represent as president are counting on you because too many of them can't count on their employers to do the right thing. Some employers choose not to do the right thing, others don't know how to. But you do, for these reasons we are asking for a favorable report on this bill. Thank you.

In Solidarity,

Dyana Forester