



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

7 School Street • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-2096

Office. (410) 269-1940 • Fax (410) 280-2956

President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

SB 813 – Workers’ Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19 Senate Finance Committee March 9, 2021

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 813 – Workers’ Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19. My name is Donna Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC, AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

COVID-19 has negatively impacted every family. All of us have seen the effects – economically and in health care – and many of us have lost loved ones and friends to this global pandemic. It has been a defining moment in the lives of everyone. With all the conversations in policy circles focused on how to “return to normal”, many of our friends and family do not have the luxury of that return because they are working hard, every day, in this “new normal”. It is imperative that we do everything that we can to provide the support to our first responders, front-line health care workers, public-sector workers, teachers and school staff, and those who must work in environments where their potential exposure to this virus is at its highest level. In short, we must protect our essential workers.

SB 813 adds COVID-19 as a presumption to Workers’ Compensation law to these essential workers. This is not a concept confined to Maryland. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 17 states and Puerto Rico have taken action to extend workers compensation coverage to include COVID-19 as a work-related illness. Nine states have enacted legislation creating a presumption of coverage for various types of workers¹. This pandemic is truly global in scope, and States are taking action to protect our essential workers.

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/>

Failure to take action to add COVID-19 as a Workers Compensation presumption means that Maryland taxpayers will be picking up the tab for the health care costs of many workers who are not covered by insurance. While we are facing a pandemic-related recession that is already displacing workers and wreaking economic havoc on our State, the last thing we need is to continue to divert tax dollars to the health care needs of essential workers who contract COVID-19 at the workplace. COVID-19 is a workplace-related injury for far too many workers in our State, and it should be treated as such.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 813.