

Good afternoon Chair Kelley and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Kimberly Reid and I am also here on behalf of my sister, Theresa Leaman, who could not testify today as she is recovering in a rehabilitation facility from contracting COVID-19 at her place of employment. Residents just like my sister, we call for a favorable report to SB 813.

You will hear from representatives and lobbyists from the lucrative insurance companies who will argue that this bill is not necessary because the current process—whereby the burden of proof is on the employee, not management, to show that they contracted COVID-19 at their employment—works. My sister's case, in which management at her job terminated her while she was in a drug-induced coma from COVID-19 and denied her workers compensation claim, proves otherwise.

In March of 2020, my sister, who has been employed at Patuxent River Health and Rehabilitation Center came into contact at her job with a resident who had contracted COVID-19. The initial response from management was to give employees a surgical mask with directions to "make it last the week or until it falls apart." Other forms of PPE—hospital gowns, hazmat suits, face shields, etc. were hardly ever in use, and when they were, hospital staff were told to reuse them frequently, or even asked to wear patient gowns to protect them from the virus.

At the end of March 2020, while the Governor instituted a mandated stay-at-home order, my employer labeled me an essential employee, and required that I report in person to my workplace. During this time period, we had a number of residents and employees at the facility test positive for COVID-19, and with some infected staff having to quarantine for at least 14 days, many staff still at her work would have to scramble and move throughout the building in order to cover the tasks that needed to be completed on a day-to-day basis. This demanding and hectic schedule, coupled with the governor's stay-at-home order, made it so the only activity she did outside of her home was to travel to and from work.

Within one month, my sister tested positive for COVID-19. Her oxygen levels hovered around 90%. When those levels declined to around 85%, my sister was rushed to the University of Maryland St. Charles Regional Hospital, and remained intubated and in intensive care for roughly a month. On June first, she was taken out of the ICU and moved into a negative pressure room, and was celebrated by the hospital staff as the first person make it off the ventilator in 4 or 5 years. After nearly two months of intensive physical therapy, she was finally able, with the help of a few strong fireman, to make it up my steps back into my home. However, she had learned that while she was in a comma on a ventilator on May 11, management terminated her from her position. (Technically, management at her job said she "voluntarily quit" her position, while she was in a comma and on a ventilator.)

She still suffers from some complications due the contracting the virus to this very day—including congestive heart failure, something that has been known to be a long-term effect of contracting the virus. She has had to fight two fronts in this battle—one with the virus and its long-term complications on her health, and, unfortunately, one against her employer who terminated her while she was in a comma, denied her unemployment insurance claims, and is currently denying her on a workers compensation claim.

Members of the committee, what has happened to my sister is what is what is happening, or can happen in the future, to any working Marylander as we try to emerge from this pandemic. She, along with other essential workers, have been on the frontlines in the war against COVID-19 for over one year

and counting. Please do not force them to fight two fights, one against the virus and one against bosses and their well-to-do insurance companies who will deny workers comp benefits just to maintain their bottom line. I again call for a favorable report to SB 813. Thank you.