



# MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**SB 727 – Maryland Healthy Working Families Act –  
Revisions and Public Health Emergency Leave  
Senate Finance Committee  
March 17, 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 testify in support of SB 727 – Maryland Healthy Working Families Act – Revisions and Public Health Emergency Leave. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

Working Marylanders are struggling. The COVID-19 pandemic has upended the lives of all of us, but for working people who were already living paycheck-to-paycheck in 2019, this public health emergency has been particularly challenging. Between job-losses, caring for sick loved ones, and struggling to pay the bills, workers need breathing room right now, more than ever. SB 727 amends the Maryland Health Working Families Act (MHWFA) to provide some of that breathing room. The bill expands earned sick leave to more workers, and, most importantly, provides for additional earned sick leave in the event of a public health emergency, while also expanding the definition of a “family member” for the purposes of taking off work to care for someone.

It took six years to pass the MHWFA in Maryland, with numerous rounds of negotiations and concessions. Some of these concessions by the advocates of the law were exemptions for certain classifications of workers. We have never been happy that Maryland has created a tiered system for workers, and SB 727 removes some of those exemptions. Regardless of your job, you deserve earned sick leave. Sickness and health issues do not ignore agriculture workers and temp workers simply because they have been exempted from earned sick leave. They can and do suffer with health problems like any other worker, so they should be afforded the same rights.

The definition of “family” is constantly changing, and who I consider part of my family – to whom I am closest – may not be the same definition you use for yours. SB 727 expands the definition of “family member” for the purposes of using earned sick leave to provide care or legal services for more individuals. This allows all of us to better honor the bonds that we have

with those whom we hold most dear in our lives, and to not penalize Marylanders for having non-traditional familial bonds.

Providing for expanding sick leave during a health emergency is both the right thing to do for workers, and for businesses. Clearly, we need to ensure that workers can take more time off during a pandemic due to more infections, more sickness, and more need to tend to family. However, businesses benefit in the long run by retaining quality workers – thus reducing their retraining and retention costs – and realizing higher average productivity through increased esprit de corps of their workforce. SB 727 does not permanently set a new expansion of earned sick leave hours and applicability, but it does provide for a mechanism for us to address the current pandemic, as well as future health emergencies, for working Marylanders.

**We ask for a favorable report on SB 727.**