



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Finance Committee
March 9, 2021**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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SB0813: UNFAVORABLE

Workers' Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **SB0813 Workers' Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19** as an unfunded mandate that will severely impact school system resources.

Worker's compensation is an important insurance coverage for all employees, including teachers and support staff in schools. SB0813/HB1199 broadens that coverage however by adding, to an existing section of law related to first responders, a provision that education workers who fall ill are presumed to be suffering from an occupational disease contracted in the course of employment if they test positive for COVID-19 and were required to work at a location other than their home within 14 days before the onset of symptoms. Education workers include teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, administrative personnel, maintenance workers and food service staff – over 8,500 employees within the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). As a prospective bill, it would apply to cases meeting these parameters following its passage.

Unlike, for instance, the presumption as noted in the existing section of law for firefighters who have lung cancer, the ability to prove the origin of a highly prolific illness such as COVID-19 will be challenging. The bill indicates COVID-19 claims may be rebutted only if the employer can show that employment was not a contributing cause of the disease. With this presumption for an occupational disease, HCPSS will face huge financial burdens for providing worker's compensation and the investigations needed to determine if the illness was caused by the nature of the employee's job.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report of SB0813 from this Committee.