

RE: HB 290 - Employment Discrimination – Time for Filing Complaints

January 14, 2021

Position: Support

HB 290 is a bill that Maryland needs to pass so people who experience discrimination in the workplace have more time to report those experiences to the Commission on Civil Rights. The current statute limits the time to file a complaint to 180 days after an incident occurred, which can be insufficient for attempting to find remedies and justice for situations of workplace discrimination –especially when other avenues do not pan out well. Last year, this bill ran out of time to work its way through the finish line due to the shortened legislative session, but I hope that all of the events of 2020 plus what has already occurred in 2021 will give a greater sense of urgency for passing legislation that increases opportunities for equity in Maryland.

My story is one that I have shared for the past two legislative sessions. I was the only African American person at a previous place of employment where I witnessed and experienced both overt and covert racism. I reported the most explosive incident with my former director within one week of its occurrence and shared about other incidents to Human Resources (HR). I gave HR permission to investigate and, while I was legally protected from retaliation from my former director, the work environment became increasingly cold and hostile towards me, so I took a pay cut to leave that position for one at another site in this company. Despite keeping in touch with HR and talking directly to the CEO multiple times, the investigation yielded no remedies for me. By the time all of that played out, I could not make a complaint to the MD Commission on Civil Rights because it was past the current 6 month/180-day time frame. Eventually, I left the company all together even though I did not immediately have a job lined up afterwards.

The stress and anxiety of everything caused debilitating migraines for over a year -one of which lasted for over 20 days in a row at one point. It took a long time and thousands of dollars in co-pays to heal from the physical and emotional effects of working for that company. When I calculate the amount of money I spent in medical expenses, the difference between what I could have been earning if I continued to have the first job (i.e., calculating salary with cost-of-living adjustments) and what I have been earning, and the savings I lived off of in between leaving that company and securing my current job, the total is around \$120,000. That has been the cost of experiencing workplace discrimination in my life.

People like me who have dealt with workplace discrimination need opportunities to seek remedies and justice. Discrimination costs us financially, jeopardizes our health, creates barriers to future employment (e.g., ability to have professional references from a former employer), and so much more. I ask that you give HB 290 a favorable report so Maryland can take a step towards greater equity for workers.

Respectfully submitted,
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