



190 West Ostend St., #201  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
Phone: 410.547.1515  
Fax: 410.837.5436

Patrick Moran - President

**Testimony**  
**SB 813 – Workers’ Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID–19**  
**Finance**  
**March 9, 2021**  
**Support with Amendment**

AFSCME Council 3 strongly supports SB 813. This legislation would provide that employees who are suffering from the effects of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 are presumed to have an occupational disease they suffered in the line of duty or course of employment and is workers’ compensation eligible.

We have never dealt with a challenge like COVID-19 before. Frontline employees across Maryland have fearlessly continued reporting to work even through shortages of PPE and information. As we learned more about the virus, other states identified ‘hot spots’ where the virus was likely to grow out of. In Maryland, frontline staff heard the call and responded to the challenge. Because of the work of frontline employees, we have limited community transmission out of our public congregate care facilities.

This has been done while having to surmount seemingly endless obstacles put before us:

- A lack of Personal Protective Equipment, a fight still ongoing over getting N95 masks to our members and appropriate gowns for those in closest contact of the virus;
- A lack of planning and safety protocols that have led to wildly divergent responses to outbreaks from facility to facility, campus to campus. To this day AFSCME has been unable to bring the University System of Maryland to the table to negotiate health and safety protocols for a virus that cares not whether you’re a Terrapin or a Terrier.
- Our neighbor to the south, Virginia, became the first state in the nation to establish detailed coronavirus-related safety mandates that all companies under the jurisdiction of VOSH must abide by. The General Assembly has seen numerous bills introduced this session to address this situation, and AFSCME is wholeheartedly supporting them.
- But I would be remiss if I didn’t point out that Maryland’s chronic understaffing of its facilities made a bad situation worse.

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An employee has the right to a union representative if requested by the employee.  
800.492.1996

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All of this has come with a horrible cost: thousands of state employees have contracted the virus while continuing to serve Marylanders, particularly those in crisis. And to date, we are *aware* of ten deaths in the Division of Corrections, the Department of Health, the Department of Transportation and within the campuses of the University System.

We applaud Senator Klausmeier and the other General Assembly members who have championed workers' compensation eligibility for those stricken by the pandemic. The long-term effects of COVID-19 are still being discovered, and while we are still learning of these effects, we know that a fair and equitable starting point for presumption of eligibility should be the date of declared emergency, March 5, 2020. We respectfully request that the bill be amended to retroactively apply to that date.

We thank you, and strongly urge a favorable report of SB 813 with amendment.