



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB 909

Maryland Healthy Working Families Act – Applicability

House Economic Matters Committee

March 2, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly opposes HB 909, which exempts an employee from the Healthy Working Families Act who is called to work by a local board of education on an as-needed basis, can reject or accept the shift offered, and is not guaranteed to be called on to work by the local board of education

As of February 11, 2018, more than 700,000 Maryland workers now have access to earned sick leave - and we should not go backwards. Nearly four in ten private-sector workers – and 80% of low-wage workers – were previously unable to earn a single sick day to recover from common, short-term illnesses. Families that are already living in or near poverty can least afford to lose income due to illness, yet half of Maryland workers earning less than \$35,000 couldn't earn sick days in Maryland prior to February 2018. For our most vulnerable neighbors, just a few days of lost pay is often equivalent to an entire month's grocery budget or rent payment, thus rolling back the Healthy Working Families Act could be financially catastrophic for low-income Marylanders.

Even seemingly “minor” changes to the Healthy Working Families Act – like HB 909 - could negatively impact our state’s workers, families, and the health of our communities. In particular, HB 909 would eliminate the ability for substitutes to earn sick and safe leave, and Maryland should not adopt policies that would force *any* school employees - regular or substitute - to show up for work sick. Additionally, the Healthy Working Families Act already exempts any employee who “regularly works less than 12 hours a week for an employer,” so substitutes who only work occasionally are already exempt. The current law reflects a reasonable balance between enabling substitutes with more regular contact with the school community to earn leave, while exempting those who don't regularly work.

Access to earned sick leave provides economic security for working Marylanders, and ultimately creates the stability necessary for low-income families to move out of poverty. Changing access to earned sick leave before we've had time to analyze its impact is short-sighted and potentially detrimental. Maryland workers have waited years for access to earned sick leave, and should not bear the burdens of harmful new exemptions and changes.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges an unfavorable report on HB 909.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.