



Testimony for HB 581

Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)

Bill Sponsor: Delegate D. Davis

Committee: Economic Matters and Appropriation

Organization Submitting: Our Revolution Howard County

Person Submitting: David LeGrande, Vice-chair and Paul Baicich, Chair

Position: Favorable

We are presenting this testimony on behalf of Our Revolution Howard County (ORHoCo), the county chapter of an organization inspired by the political and social messages of Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT). We fight for values and policies covering climate-change, health care, and economic and racial justice that focus on the needs of our neighbors, co-workers, and working families, particularly in this time of COVID.

For many years, Maryland essential workers have not been provided certain protections and benefits through their employment. This issue has become more severe during the COVID-19 crisis negatively impacting thousands of Maryland essential workers. HB 581, Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers' Act) comprehensively addresses these concerns. For example,

- During an emergency, all essential employers shall provide working conditions that reduce physical harms and mental distress and detriment and ensure physical health and safety; Provide essential workers necessary and required personal protective equipment at no cost; and Create and maintain written protocols to enforce necessary workplace hygienic practices or disease mitigation measures.
- Define an Unsafe Work Environment as one which includes unsanitary working conditions; an employer's failure to provide personal protective equipment; lack of employer adherence to federal and state health and safety standards related to the emergency; an essential employer's failure to develop and enforce required health and safety protocols; an essential employer's failure to notify workers of illnesses, improperly functioning equipment, or other dangerous or hazardous working conditions.
- Further, HB 581 authorizes essential workers to refuse to perform unsafe work during an emergency with protection from employer retaliation including discharge and disciplinary action and establishes adjudication procedures for worker complaints and employer illegal actions.

- Requires essential employers to prepare a written health emergency preparedness plan for responding to a catastrophic health emergency and make this plan available to essential workers.
- Requires essential employers to develop and enact procedures to control the risk of transmission and contraction of infectious diseases including informing workers of potential exposure, evacuating the workplace until it has been properly sanitized, and providing payment directly or through health insurance coverage for the cost of required illness/disease testing.
- Requires essential employers to provide essential workers with hazard pay during an emergency as well with financial assistance for unreimbursed health care costs for those workers who have developed an emergency-related illness or injury.

For the above reasons, Our Revolution Howard County encourages support for HB581.

Thank you.

- David LeGrande, ORHoCo Vice-chair
- Paul Baicich, ORHoCo Chair

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