



Maryland Community Health System

Committee: House Economic Matters Committee

Bill Number: House Bill 581 – Labor and Employment – Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers’ Protection Act)

Hearing Date: February 5, 2021

Position: Oppose

Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) opposes *House Bill 581 – Labor and Employment – Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers’ Protection Act)*. The bill is well-intentioned and seeks to support front-line employees during the public health emergency. We are supportive of some of the provisions of the bill, such as requiring a special enrollment period so that that more people can obtain insurance coverage during the pandemic.

Maryland Community Health System consists of a network of federal qualified health centers across the State of Maryland. Our health centers are providing a high level of support to their clinicians and frontline staff. Unfortunately, several provisions of the bill would have severe negative impact on our health centers:

- **Hazzard pay requirements could devastate our health centers:** Federally qualified health centers primarily serve individuals who are uninsured or enrolled in public coverage programs, including Medicaid and Medicare. Our health centers lack the resources to provide the long-term hazard pay that is required by the bill; and
- **Ability of workers to refuse to work in an “unsafe” environment:** Our health centers prioritize the safety of their patients and employees. We are concerned that provision regarding the ability of essential workers to refuse to work in an “unsafe” environment is too vague. It will lead to situations where essential workers can refuse to work – even if their employers are following State and federal guidelines. As a result, safety net health providers could be left without sufficient staff to provide basic health care services.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net or (443) 926-3443.

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