



House Bill 496

Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Establishment

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Economic Matters Committee

Date: February 15, 2022

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 496. This bill would create and implement a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Program funded through shared employee and employer contributions. The Program would provide up to 24 weeks of benefits to covered individuals taking leave due to specific personal and family circumstances.

Counties strive to provide their employees with the most reasonable and practical accommodations, including various forms of paid leave, that make the most sense for the different needs of each county. Under HB 496, counties would be forced to participate in a uniform, one-size-fits-all program that does not consider the unique needs or abilities of each county. Under the bill, all counties would have no choice but to fund mandated employer contributions — competing for limited local funds against school construction, public safety, roadway maintenance, and other essential public services. Also concerning is the potential for employer contribution rates for this proposed program to eventually increase to maintain fund solvency, as more employees take advantage of this benefit and its funding obligations grow.

Additionally, the entitlement to benefits under HB 496 far exceed any statutory length of leave, presenting innumerable challenges for employers. To the extent that local government employees may take more leave, under the bill, the FAMLI program may overburden local systems that are already experiencing staffing shortages and retention challenges, especially for law enforcement and other agencies that provide 24/7 services for the communities in which they operate.

This legislation does not appropriately balance the goals of helping employees with the economic realities that counties are facing or the unique needs of each jurisdiction. As such, the unintended consequences of this bill could jeopardize public safety and the delivery of necessary services for our shared constituents. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 496.