

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
HB 496 – Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave
Insurance Program - Establishment

House Economic Matters Committee
February 15, 2022



Health Care for the Homeless supports HB 496, which establishes a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program through which employees may take up to 12 weeks of paid leave from their jobs to care for new children, other family members with serious health conditions or disabilities, or themselves. Health Care for the Homeless is deeply committed to equitably supporting our staff as whole people. As a nonprofit agency of 250 employees, we have long offered paid time off and paid parental leave to help our staff navigate changes in their lives – and it has only improved retention and morale.

We applaud this body for taking important measures over the last several years to support Marylanders in the workplace, such as providing employees paid sick days and increasing Maryland’s minimum wage. Providing access to paid family and medical leave is an important next step to help enable workers across Maryland to deal with life events like a major illness or caring for a new child without facing financial hardship.

Establishing a program like paid family and medical leave program would enable workers across Maryland to deal with life events like a major illness or caring for a new child without facing financial hardship. This has been true for our agency which has implemented similar policies. And, importantly, our doors have remained open for the clients we serve.

You will hear from employers who claim that establishing a paid family and medical leave program would negatively impact their bottom line. We heard the same unfounded fears when other policies to support Maryland workers were being considered. Take, for instance, raising the minimum wage. Contrary to what some small businesses and non-profits argued - that they could not afford \$15/hr. and it would result in layoffs - our agency is proof that raising the minimum wage was good for staff and employers, both. We instituted a wage floor many years before the General Assembly passed legislation to increase minimum wage and what actually happened is that we hired more staff and have since more than tripled in size. Staff morale and retention improved, and staff took fewer hardship loans against their retirement accounts.

Similarly, we found that offering our employees benefits like paid time off and paid parental leave help support employees and their families. And, importantly, our doors have remained open. In fact, we provide more care and services to more clients because of our policies that help keep our staff and their families safe and healthy. In fact, businesses in Maryland and throughout the country that have offered paid leave have found similarly positive results. In states that have paid family leave laws, reports from businesses have shown that after five years of implementation, opponents’ concerns about costs, litigation, and administrative burdens had generally not panned out.¹

¹ See Jennifer Redmond and Evgenia Fkiaras, “California Paid Family Leave Act Is Less Onerous Than Predicted,” Society for Human Resource Management Legal Report, 2010, https://www.sheppardmullin.com/media/article/809_CA%20Paid%20Family%20Leave%20Act%20Is%20Less%20Onerous%20Than%20Predicted.pdf.

Policies promoted by this bill are good for everyone, and we strongly stand behind this bill. We urge you to issue a favorable report on HB 496.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.