



HB 496 - Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Establishment
Economic Matters Committee
February 15, 2022
SUPPORT

Chair Wilson, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 496. This bill will protect families from financial crisis from becoming sick or caring for a loved one.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) is a federal program that provides insurance to employees that work for a covered employer. However, this is not an option for many employees in Maryland which leaves them with limited or no options. Some employees have access to unpaid leave, while others risk being fired for taking leave. When employees encounter health related hardships, they experience high levels of mental, emotional, and physical stress. This stress is increased by the demands of work and the inability to stop working to appropriately address concerns. Decision making, healing, and financial stability are compromised when employees do not have adequate options to navigate difficult times.

Families have been battling a global pandemic since early 2020. Maryland has had over 900,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19¹. Some of the families affected were able to take an appropriate time away from work without fear of losing their jobs or losing crucial income. Many families were not. The need has increased to protect worker's ability to care for themselves and their families. There are new strands of COVID-19, which have a higher transmission rate². This can lead to more COVID-19 cases and lengthen the duration of the pandemic. Also, there are long term effects of surviving COVID-19³. This can leave people with serious short- and long-term complications. The Time to Care Act will provide protection to address immediate concerns, and it will provide a safety net for future medical complications. COVID-19 not only threatens the health of Marylanders, but it also threatens the financial security of those directly and indirectly affected. HB 8 will allow individuals the time and space they need to care for loved ones that may have a serious illness or disability, address any personal health issues, and care for and bond with newborns.

A Family and Medical Leave Insurance program would benefit individuals and families by protecting workers who need to stay home to care for themselves or family members. They would not lose vital income, which could leave low to moderate income families to face housing instability, accumulation of debt, and inability to build long-term wealth and assets. Ensuring that employees can safely take time off, will ensure that Maryland employees will not have to choose between their own or their family's health and maintaining their economic security.

For these reasons, we encourage a favorable report on HB 496.

¹ [COVID Maryland](#)

² [CDC](#)

³ [CDC](#)