



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**SB 782 – Workgroup on the Post-COVID-19 Crisis Economic Transition
Senate Finance Committee
March 1, 2022**

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 782 – Workgroup on the Post-COVID-19 Crisis Economic Transition, with amendments. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

Our economy is changing in Maryland, the United States, and globally. COVID-19 exposed and exacerbated existing problems within our economy, and revealed opportunities to improve the lives of workers and their families, should we make the correct policy choices in these unprecedented times. SB 782 is a necessary step in determining those choices and how best we can take advantage of the changing economy, as well as how we can positively direct that change to benefit our state.

SB 782 is incredibly inclusive of the business community by including five members, but without the labor community involved, any policy recommendations will be heavily tilted in the direction of business owners, potentially leaving the needs of workers completely unaddressed. Plenty of representation on this workgroup exists to protect the profits of business, but there are no voices who will stand up for wages and benefits, and for the vast majority of workers in Maryland who will be impacted the most by SB 782 and the policies that flow from the workgroup.

We do not seek worker representation on this workgroup for simple parity with business representation. The effect that this pandemic had on Maryland's workforce cannot be understated, and we must mitigate future harm with present action. According to a 2019 report by New America, every food, grocery, and retail worker predicted a significant increase in technology in the future and a decline in the number of people working in their stores¹. Many workers are pessimistic about the future for humans in their workplace, fearing their employers view them as a cost they will cut through automation. That fear has only been exacerbated by this pandemic and stretches across more sectors of our economy.

¹ <https://www.newamerica.org/work-workers-technology/reports/worker-voices/executive-summary/>

With one amendment adding labor expertise, we can make SB 782 representative of the entirety of Maryland's economy, by including workers along with businesses. Labor supports the bill with the following amendment:

On page 1, after line 18:

4. FIVE MEMBERS OF THE LABOR SECTOR, INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES FROM SECTORS IDENTIFIED, AS DESIGNATED BY THE MARYLAND STATE AND DC AFL-CIO.

We ask for a favorable report with the above amendment on SB 782.