

MARCH 9, 2022

Wage Standards, Sufficient Medicaid Rates Would Strengthen Long-Term Care in Maryland

Position Statement in Support of House Bill 981

Given before the House Health and Government Operations Committee

Maryland's budget is a moral document that has the power to move us toward broadly shared prosperity if invested wisely, and just as much power to move us in the wrong direction if not. Investing Marylanders' shared resources in decent jobs that pay a family-supporting wage is vital to support a healthy, equitable economy. House Bill 981 would advance these goals while strengthening our long-term care workforce. For these reasons, **the Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports House Bill 981.**

Long-term care workers provide essential services to aging Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities, but the state struggles to meet the need for these workers.ⁱ Demographic change is expected to worsen this shortfall in coming years and decades. Paltry wages and dangerous working conditions are an important contributor to this worker shortage, and disproportionately harm women of color, who constitute the bulk of this workforce.ⁱⁱ

- 88% of home care workers in Maryland are women.
- 61% of home care workers in Maryland are Black, and 72% are workers of color.
- 40% of home care workers in Maryland were born outside the United States.
- Home health and personal care aides in Maryland typically took home only \$13.51 per hour in 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ

House Bill 981 would strengthen Maryland's long-term care workforce by requiring home care provider agencies to pay personal care aides at least \$16 per hour beginning in July 2023. At the same time, the bill would require the state to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for this care by 15%, ensuring that agencies can afford to pay decent wages.

Strengthening protections to ensure workers paid livable wages would directly benefit workers and would also reduce barriers to maintaining a sufficient home care workforce to provide essential supports to aging Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the House Health and Government Operations Committee make a favorable report on House Bill 981.

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 981

Bill summary

House Bill 981 would require home care provider agencies to pay personal care aides at least \$16 per hour beginning in July 2023. The bill would also require the state to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for this care by 15% beginning in July 2023.

Background

Long-term care workers provide essential services to aging Marylanders and Marylanders with disabilities, but the state struggles to meet the need for these workers.^{iv} Demographic change is expected to worsen this shortfall in coming years and decades. Research links this shortage in large part to low wages and dangerous working conditions.^v

Equity Implications

House Bill 981 would strengthen protections for home care workers who face dangerous working conditions, often take home low wages, and are disproportionately women of color.^{vi} It would also benefit Marylanders with disabilities by increasing the long-term supply of workers available to provide necessary supports.

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Impact

House Bill 981 would likely **improve racial, gender, disability, and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Elizabeth Shwe, “Home Care for Older Adults Increased During COVID, but Direct Care Workers Remain Hard to Find,” *Maryland Matters*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2021/10/07/home-care-for-older-adults-increased-during-covid-but-direct-care-workers-remain-hard-to-find/>

ⁱⁱ “The Direct Services Workforce in Long-Term Services and Supports in Maryland and the District of Columbia,” PHI, 2018, <https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DSWorkers-Maryland-2018-PHI.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics for .Maryland

^{iv} Elizabeth Shwe, “Home Care for Older Adults Increased During COVID, but Direct Care Workers Remain Hard to Find,” *Maryland Matters*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2021/10/07/home-care-for-older-adults-increased-during-covid-but-direct-care-workers-remain-hard-to-find/>

^v “The Direct Services Workforce in Long-Term Services and Supports in Maryland and the District of Columbia,” PHI, 2018, <https://phinational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DSWorkers-Maryland-2018-PHI.pdf>

^{vi} “The Direct Services Workforce,” 2018

^{vii} Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics for .Maryland