



Testimony in Support of SB 468

Funding for Wage Increases for Medical Provider Workers

Dear Chair Guzzone and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

My name is Toni Holly and I have been a geriatric nursing assistant in a long-term care facility in Maryland for 39 years. I'm a member of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, the largest healthcare workers union in the nation. We represent over 10,000 workers in Maryland/DC. Our union urges a favorable report for SB 468 Funding for Health Care Workers. I am thankful for Senator Rosapepe's leadership to push Maryland to invest in its care workforce just as 22 other states have done.

The Maryland Medicaid Wage Passthrough Act works to increase Medicaid Reimbursement Rates and ensure a fair portion of that increase goes directly towards worker wages and benefits. Due to low wages, long term care industry experiences high turnover and a staffing crisis.

Personally, as a healthcare worker I know first hand that the turnover has been increasing. Additionally, the pay for healthcare workers has not increased at the rate as other professionals which forces aides to have to work longer hours to be able to afford the rising cost of living. This has lead to many of my colleagues to leave the profession and seek career opportunities in other fields causing a staffing shortage through out long term care. We need to invest in our health care workforce. Without our care workforce, facilities will not be able to provide adequate care to their residents that depend on caregivers.

Nursing homes have been the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our care team including certified nursing assistants, maintenance, dietary aides, and housekeeping felt burnt out with overwhelming workloads, dangerous staffing shortages, and the emotional toll of caring for residents facing isolation, sickness, and death. The pandemic highlighted the brokenness of our long-term care system. The need for long term care services will only rise in the state, and this legislation ensures we are adequately supporting the care workforce.

Investing in the care workforce in Maryland's nursing homes is a good public health policy and is a matter of racial equity. The direct care workforce in our nursing homes is overwhelmingly made up of Black women¹. We are not only failing to attract new workers to these jobs, but we are also trapping those who are currently in this workforce in poverty.

Because care can't wait, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 468.

Sincerely,

Toni Holly, toniholly76@gmail.com