



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 Kirsatl Kennedy and I am a geriatric nursing assistant in a long term care facility in Maryland. 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 leadership to push Maryland to invest in its care workers through the Medicaid Reimbursement Rates 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.

I work over 60 hours a week and my take home pay is only about \$800 and this is barely enough to pay my rent, and make sure I am paying all my bills. Not only am I working night shifts and long hours, there are always a shortage of GNAs so while the standard is 1 GNA to 11 patients, there are weeks where I am taking care of about 20 patients.

It was already bad, but the pandemic really burnt us out and showed us how little the system really cares about us or our patients. We were overworked, underpaid, and at risk of spreading COVID-19 all while trying to take care of our families and residents.

It's not just nurses, our housekeeping and dietary aides in the nursing homes are the most understaffed. It takes longer for rooms to get disinfected and cleaned, patient meal times are impacted as well. They are an important part of our care team.

I remember I had one patient in particular who had come into the nursing home relatively healthy and mobile. He would get up and go on walks around the building, but when we faced the staffing crisis, he was getting bed sores, unable to get out of bed and became completely bed-ridden. I have seen patients die because management did not ensure we had the appropriate number of staff on call.

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,

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