



Testimony in Support of SB 604

Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Provider Agencies and Personal Care Aides - Reimbursement and Wages

Dear Chair Griffith and members of the Finance committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation – representing 10,000 healthcare workers in long-term care facilities and hospitals across Maryland. 1199 SEIU supports SB 604 because we believe the state needs to invest in our essential care workers.

1199 SEIU is at the forefront of navigating a dire shortage of healthcare workers across hospitals and long term care. We know that the demand for home care is increasing as Maryland's population of those 65 and older will exponentially increase. In order to meet the need adequately, Maryland will need 40 percent more care workers over the next 10 years¹.

Investing in Maryland's long term care system means higher Medicaid reimbursement rates for agencies and fair share resulting in higher wages for workers. Because state Medicaid agencies set reimbursement rates and pay for many of these workers, states have the opportunity and responsibility to improve outcomes for home care workers and the families they serve by ensuring that the home health care workforce is supported by family sustaining wages.

Fair pay for personal care aides is a race equity and gender equity issue. PCAs are about 90% women and 70% are Black. Nearly 1 in 10 personal care aides live in poverty in the state. Higher wages means personal care aides are relying less on public assistance, improve quality care, and attract more people to stay in the field.

1199 SEIU also supports SB 604 because it addresses the lack of adequate data and transparency about Maryland's home care workers. Requiring annual cost reports from publicly funded home care agencies will ensure compliance and provide MDH vital information on how public dollars are being spent to meet the needs of Maryland's aging population.

Because care can't wait and for the reasons above, we request a **favorable** report on SB 604.

In Unity,

Ricarra Jones, Political Director

ricarra.jones@1199.org