



Testimony for HB 490

Residential Service Agencies – Employee Registry

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and members of the House Health Government Operations Committee:

My Name is Beth MacDonald. I work in Massachusetts as a home care worker for over 25 years. I am a member of the 1199 SEIU in Massachusetts. Massachusetts passed the home care registry in 2017 and I have seen the outcomes of a state that cares for its home care workers. To support workers in Maryland, I urge you to issue a favorable report on HB 490 and establishing a home care registry.

A home care registry is a foundational tool for supporting the home care workforce. Because of low pay and poor benefits, many of my colleagues leave the field for more stable, less stressful jobs. Thousands of Marylanders are relying on home care services, the state has no plan in place to ensure you are retaining workers and that workers have the training they need to meet client needs.

Even working full time as a home care worker, I have struggled with housing insecurity and barely making ends meet. My partner who lives with disabilities relies on me to take care of them, and I am grateful that in the past 5 years Massachusetts has been working to get home care workers higher pay, more workforce development opportunities, and more stability. In April this year, the hourly wage will increase to \$18.25 for a home care worker in Massachusetts.

Because of the registry, all home care workers received letters from the State of Massachusetts stating that they are essential health care workers. This helped to make sure workers had appropriate protective gear and guidance regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Home care workers in Maryland were left behind during the pandemic.

Massachusetts was able to collect data to find that a greater percentage of workers in healthcare support occupations reported one or more underlying medical conditions that may increase the risk for severe COVID-19 complications when compared to all other workers in non-healthcare occupations and compared to health diagnosis and treating practitioners (26.3% vs. 19.3% and 18.0%)¹. This finding among several others has helped the state adequately support home care workers during the pandemic. I worry that Maryland is neglecting home care workers and will not be equipped for a future pandemic.

I urge legislators to follow the example of Massachusetts to support home care workers and those who rely on their care in Maryland. I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 490.

Sincerely,

Beth MacDonald

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¹<https://www.mass.gov/doc/characterizing-ma-workers-in-select-covid-19-essential-services-healthcare-workers/download>