



SB202/HB279: Prescription Drug Affordability Board – Upper Payment Limits
Position: FAVORABLE

To Chair Griffith and Members of the Senate Finance Committee; Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones. I'm the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, the largest healthcare workers union in the United States, with over 10,000 members in Maryland/DC. Our union supports SB202/HB279 to reestablish the requirement for a Prescription Drug Affordability Board. We urge your Committees to issue **favorable** reports.

Healthcare workers know firsthand the biggest barrier to accessing health care is whether or not the patient can afford it – this includes not only the initial cost of visiting a healthcare provider, it extends to the patient's ability to afford the medications recommended by that provider. 1199 members have seen patients' health deteriorate due to the patient not being able to afford their medication. The more severe an un or undermedicated patient's condition becomes, the higher their medical bill ultimately will be, and the more difficult their condition becomes to treat. The high cost of healthcare, including expensive prescription drugs, fuels an unjust cycle of poverty and illness that punishes patients for getting sick.

There is an extreme short staffing crisis across the healthcare industry in Maryland, and Maryland has the longest hospital wait-times in the entire country. To address short staffing and ensure patients can receive emergency care quickly there must be a more sustainable patient to worker ratio. The best way to alleviate the burden on overworked and underpaid healthcare workers is to raise their wages; but we also need to ensure that patients are receiving preventative and primary care so they don't end up in the hospital or a Long-Term care facility with a more severe medical condition because the patient could not afford their prescription medications.

Many healthcare workers are patients themselves. One 1199 member shared her story, saying: "I have diabetes, but my insurance does not cover the cost of my medication, and I can't afford to pay for it out of pocket. Because of this, I was not able to take my diabetes medication for four months. Leaving my illness untreated made my health worse and costs me more money later. I've been on the phone with my insurance company over 10 times pleading with them to cover my medication, but they don't care. I'm not able to focus on my health when I have to spend what little free time I have arguing with the insurance company." It is unconscionable that healthcare workers, who care for our loved ones and save lives on the frontlines of the ongoing COVID19 pandemic, are unable to afford their own prescription medications.

Establishing a prescription drug affordability board with the power to cap prescription drug costs will help healthcare workers ensure their patients can afford treatment and will save patient's lives. We urge your Committees to vote **YES** on SB202/HB279: Prescription Drug Affordability Board. Thank you.

In Unity, Ricarra Jones, Political Director, 1199SEIU UHW, ricarra.jones@1199.org