

Note to MD Legislators re SB 349 (2024 Session)
Date: 2/27/2024

My name is Sharon Harding and I currently live in Talbot County, MD. I am a Registered Nurse and worked for the MD Dept of Health and Mental Hygiene from September 1988 until I retired in December 2016. I started out as a RN, worked my way up to RN, Charge and eventually a RN Supervisor. For the majority of that time I worked in Mental Health, primarily at Eastern Shore Hospital Center, but also worked at Wicomico County Health Dept in Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health and Deers Head Hospital Center.

During my time with the State of Maryland I was proud to serve the citizens of Maryland. We had many years without COLA or Step increases due to budget issues within the State, we were forced to take unpaid furlough days and I was forced to pay Union dues (even though they "could not" actually represent me due to my job classification). Most of these issues were controlled by the MD state legislators however I remained with the state because I knew the job I was doing was important and I had the assurance that the State of MD would support me and keep the promise of adequate health and prescription care when I retired.

Most of my career I worked a second job in order to provide for my two children. The salary provided by the MD was below what I could make at other places however I remained committed to the citizens of Maryland and I was able to look at the "long picture" of a more secure retirement. Health and Prescription Drug benefits for my "lifetime" were an important issue as well. Nurses realize the importance of good health care and prescription drug coverage. Psychiatric nursing is dangerous and I was injured at work more times than I can count and continue to deal with Migraine Headaches, back and knee injuries and permanent health issues due to those injuries. If I lose my current prescription coverage, I will not be able to afford the medication that helps with those issues.

During my many years of working for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene I had the honor and privilege of working with the most dedicated and professional workers that I have ever come across in my life. They genuinely cared for those who were mostly overlooked by society and we did our best to return them to their highest quality of life possible. We worked through all shifts, holidays, weather emergencies and every budget cut and we did it with grace and we did it WITHOUT caring about race, religion, national origin or "citizenship". We respected each other's differences as fellow employees and patients in our care.

State of Maryland workers do the jobs that private entities do not want to do because it's not glamorous or profitable. Maryland's budget was 'balanced' on the backs of your workers and the State Of Maryland can not function AT ALL without your state workers.

In our yearly benefits packages from the year 1988-2010 we were promised to be able to keep our Health and Prescription Benefits at the same rate as current state workers, once we were "vested" state employees.

We kept (and continue to keep) our word to the citizens of Maryland and are asked you to please KEEP YOUR WORD and support SB 349 which will restore Retiree Prescription Program coverage at the same level as active state employees. We continue to pay our share of those benefits and already completed our part of the bargain.

Thank you for your thoughtful and fair consideration of this Senate Bill. And thank you to Senator McKay and all of the other legislators who want to do the right thing and undo this injustice to state retirees.

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