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HB261: Unemployment Insurance – Benefits – Election Judges

Hearing before the House Economic Matters Committee, Feb. 14, 2024

Position: FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Workplace Justice Project works to expand and enforce the right of low-wage workers to receive an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. **The PJC supports HB261, which will ensure that unemployed Marylanders can serve as election judges without jeopardizing the unemployment insurance benefits they are eligible for.**

The problem: Maryland's unemployment insurance law does not exclude election judge stipends from the definition of "wages." Under Maryland's current law, an unemployed Marylander who receives unemployment insurance benefits can receive just \$50/week in wages before their benefits are reduced or terminated. Moreover, the law allows the Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL) to deny unemployment benefits for a Marylander's services as an election judge. This acts as a disincentive for Marylanders to serve as election judges.

The solution: exclude election judge stipends from "wages" and prevent MDOL from terminating the benefits of someone whose unavailability to do other work arises from service as an election judge. Maryland should follow the lead of states such as Colorado, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Jersey, and New York that have exempted election judge payments from being counted against eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **SUPPORTS HB261** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. Should you have any questions, please call David Rodwin at 410-625-9409 ext. 249.