



Ashley Woolard, Staff Attorney
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, ext. 224
woolarda@publicjustice.org

HB 568
Community Health Worker Appreciation Day
Hearing of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 28, 2024
1:00 PM

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 Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. We **strongly support HB 568**, which would require the Governor to annually proclaim May 8th as Community Health Worker (CHW) Appreciation Day. It would also urge educational and cultural organizations to promote the work of CHWs with informative programs and activities.

CHWs are a vital building block in achieving true health equity across Maryland. With pride, Maryland has the 4th largest CHW workforce in the country while Baltimore City has the 5th largest CHW workforce among metropolitan areas in the country. Because CHWs often come from the communities that they serve and share common barriers to attaining good health with their community, they are in a unique position to build trust and provide a patient-centered approach to care. Through education, advocacy and social support, CHWs help eliminate racial and economic disparities in health outcomes. But we've fallen behind in recognizing the value and contributions of these incredible frontline public health workers to patient care and continuity in care. Despite evidence that CHWs help reduce health disparities and generate significant cost savings for our healthcare system, Maryland's Medicaid program still does not reimburse their services.

HB 568 is a meaningful step in publicly recognizing this unique workforce and their undoubtedly impactful contributions to improving the health of low-income patient communities. For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 568**. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Woolard at 410-625-9409 x 224 or woolarda@publicjustice.org.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages – 21-1094 Community Health Workers (May 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211094.htm>.