

Testimony of Kenneth Jenkins in Support of SB431 – Home of the Brave Act (Long Covid Occupational Disease Workers’ Compensation Presumption)- Favorable

My name is Kenneth Jenkins, and I am here today to share my experience with long COVID and to voice my support for the SB431 – Long Covid Occupational Disease Workers’ Compensation Presumption – that addresses this condition for workers like me. As someone who has experienced the debilitating effects of Long COVID firsthand, I believe it is crucial to provide adequate support and protection for individuals like myself who are struggling with this illness.

Covid changed my life. I came down with Covid in late March 2020. It started with a fever, body aches, headaches, and other gruesome symptoms. I took a Covid test, but back then you didn’t get your results right away. It took a couple of days. When I got my diagnosis, I called my wife and broke down crying. All I could think about was all the people dying from this disease.

At first, I was home, but I wasn’t getting any better. Less than two weeks after my diagnosis, I went into the hospital and then into the critical care unit. I was in critical care for three weeks, under heavy sedation. My sedation medication had to be increased because I broke my restraints and removed my life-support equipment twice. The first time, my heart stopped, and I had to be resuscitated. The second time, I aspirated and I got a huge hematoma on my forehead that I still have a scar from. I was finally able to breathe on my own on May 4, five weeks after I started having symptoms.

I have been recovering ever since. I had to re-learn to walk. I have pulmonary rehab twice a week. My wife helps me at home with physical therapy. I have issues with swallowing because I was on oxygen for so long.

I’m back at work, but not in the same position. I’ve been with Ride On in Montgomery County for 16 years. Before Covid, I was a transit coordinator with Ride On at the Silver Spring Depot. But I can’t do that job anymore. I am now a transit analyst. And while I am full-time, I am disabled from Covid. Luckily, I can telework a couple of days a week so I can continue to get some of the care that I need.

I incurred substantial medical expenses for ongoing treatment and management of my symptoms. Unfortunately, the current workers' compensation system does not adequately address the needs of individuals with long Covid. Many workers are left without the support and assistance they desperately need to cope with this debilitating condition and navigate its long-term effects on their ability to work and provide for their families.

The proposed long covid presumption workers’ compensation bill is a critical step towards fixing this injustice. By explicitly recognizing long COVID as a compensable occupational disease

and providing coverage for medical expenses, lost wages, and disability benefits, this bill would offer much-needed relief to workers grappling with the long-term consequences of COVID-19.

Furthermore, enacting this legislation would send a powerful message of support and solidarity to workers across our state who have been impacted by this devastating illness. It would demonstrate our commitment to protecting the health and well-being of our workforce and ensuring that no worker is left behind in their time of need.

I urge you to support the long COVID workers' compensation bill and take decisive action to provide essential assistance to workers like me who struggle with this debilitating illness. Together, we can ensure that no worker is forced to bear the financial and emotional burden of long COVID alone.