



Testimony on HB462
The Nursing Home Staffing Crisis Act of 2024
Position: **FAV**

Dear Chair Pena Melnyk and members of the HGO Committee:

My name is Holly Ward and I am Geriatric Nursing Assistant in a long term care facility in Maryland. I'm a member of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, the largest healthcare workers union in the nation. We represent over 10,000 workers in Maryland/DC. Our union urges a favorable report for HB462: The Nursing Home Staffing Crisis Funding Act of 2024.

This bill works to ensure a fair portion of Medicaid reimbursement rates goes directly towards worker wages and benefits. Due to low wages, the long term care industry experiences high turnover and a staffing crisis. If long-term care employers can't find workers, what will older adults and people with disabilities do to survive? How will family caregivers stay afloat financially and emotionally?

Low pay requires me to subsidize my income and rely on assistance such as food stamps. By investing in the workforce, it would enable me to provide for my family. As we know, low pay leads to high turnover which in turn increases my workload. For instance, some patients require more attention than others but due to lack of staff, we do not have the ability to spend more time with those patients. Long term care is important because no one foresees that they will need this kind of assistance. The residents do not choose to be there, nor do they want to be. Their family members are not able to take care of them and often patients rarely see them. I love my job because I am their outlet. I provide them empathy and compassion. We need legislators to realize that as medical providers, we put most of our lives into these patients. We don't have the benefit of caring for our own life. It is shameful that we do not reap the benefits after all the sacrifices that we make. We do not receive the respect we deserve when the truth is, these facilities would not run without us.

Nursing homes have been the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our care team including certified nursing assistants, maintenance, dietary aides, and housekeeping felt burnt out with overwhelming workloads, dangerous staffing shortages, and the emotional toll of caring for residents facing isolation, sickness, and death. The pandemic highlighted the brokenness of our long-term care system. The need for long term care services will only rise in the state, and this legislation ensures we are adequately supporting the care workforce.

Investing in the care workforce in Maryland's nursing homes is a good public health policy and is a matter of racial equity. The direct care workforce in our nursing homes is overwhelmingly made up of Black women. We are not only failing to attract new workers to these jobs, but we are also trapping those who are currently in this workforce in poverty. Because care can't wait, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB462.

Sincerely, Holly Ward