



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**HB 176 - Labor and Employment - Occupational Safety and Health - Revisions
(Davis Martinez Public Employee Safety and Health Act)
House Appropriations Committee
February 18, 2025**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 176. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

This essential legislation aims to improve workplace safety and hold employers of public employees accountable to on-the-job health standards. Named in honor of Davis Martinez, a Parole and Probation Agent and beloved member of one of our local unions who tragically lost his life last year while on the job, this bill seeks to prevent tragedies like his by prioritizing worker safety.

In September 2024, Maryland joined several other states in taking a significant step toward safeguarding workers in the workplace by adopting and implementing Heat Stress Standards for indoor and outdoor occupations. These standards require employers to put in place prevention plans for heat related injuries or illnesses while on the job including providing shade and water, establishing emergency response implementation, and conducting training procedures among other measures.¹ While this was an important step, it only came *after* the death of Department of Public Works employee Ronald Silver II. We cannot wait until after one of our workers is gone to do something.

¹ Alana F. Genderson and Celina Antonellis, "Maryland Joins Growing Number of States Issuing Heat Illness Prevention Standards." Lawflash. October 2024.

Many public employees, including those in correctional institutions, sanitation, healthcare, transportation, and education, face substantial risks to their health and safety every day. These employees play a critical role in delivering the public services Marylanders rely on, but the current law fails to protect them by holding employers accountable for their employees' safety and well-being.

HB 176 addresses these shortcomings by enacting several measures to enhance workplace safety standards: 1) it establishes the Public Employee Safety and Health Unit (PESHU) under the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health Agency; 2) enhances transparency and accountability through the requirement of annual reports detailing citations and safety measures; 3) combats workplace violence by requiring employers to craft and implement programs to prevent workplace violence.

This bill represents a necessary step in protecting Maryland's workforce and fostering environments where employees feel safe and supported. For these reasons, we urge the committee to vote in favor of HB 176.