



HB 1142

Interested Parties Advisory Group

House Health and Government Operations Committee

March 5, 2025

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

My name is Claudia Balog, and I am the Assistant Director of Research of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. With 450,000 members along the East Coast, we are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation – representing 10,000 healthcare workers in long-term care facilities, hospitals and clinics across Maryland. 1199 SEIU is a proud partner of the Caring Across Maryland coalition which consists of direct care workers, patients, loved ones, and advocates who are committed to improving the long-term care infrastructure in Maryland through bolstering job quality for care workers, protecting quality of care, and increasing access to affordable long-term care.

1199SEIU strongly supports HB 1142. By creating a State Interested Parties Advisory Group (IPAG), HB 1142 will ensure that home care workers, those relying on home care services, and other relevant stakeholders have a seat at the table when evaluating the Medicaid Provider rates that impact access to care and job quality. 1199 SEIU represents healthcare workers across the care continuum – long term care, hospitals, and clinics – and we know how our broken long term care infrastructure impacts our state’s unique Total Cost of Care healthcare model and our already burdened emergency rooms. Ensuring we have the care force in Maryland to let residents age safely in their homes will positively impact the entire care system.

As Maryland’s aging population grows, the demand for the services of home health aides and personal care aides will continue to increase. The demand is demonstrated by Maryland’s Medicaid Waiver waitlist for home and community-based services which is the third longest in the country with over 26,000 residents waiting for home care services. Despite the increasing demand and essential nature of home care, the caregiving work of personal care aides is still not valued- workers receive extremely low pay, few benefits and enjoy limited protections. Home care workers are still earning as low as \$15 per hour with very little job security. In Maryland, there are approximately 51,200 direct care workers, the majority of whom are Black and women of color. Tens of thousands of these direct care workers work in Home and Community Based Settings. 1199 SEIU believes that those closest to the problem are often closest to the solution. Thus, it is imperative to ensure direct care workers’ voices lead the state to adequate Medicaid

rates that can increase wages, benefits, improve retention, and ensure the state has the workforce to deliver high quality care to our state's most vulnerable.

The IPAG is one of the requirements under the 2024 Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued federal rule, entitled Ensuring Access to Medicaid Services. The Federal Access Rule aims to bolster the workforce in order to improve quality care for home and community-based services. In their inclusion of the IPAG as a federal requirement, the Biden administration acknowledged the importance of including workers voices for consumers to have increase access to critical home care services. Passing HB 1142 is especially important now because cuts to Medicaid and changes in immigration policy under the new Federal Administration may exacerbate provider shortages and reduce payment rates for home care workers.

We strongly urge the committee to vote YES on HB 1142.

Sincerely,

Claudia Balog
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