

NATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS ALLIANCE

Comments in Support of HB1142 Public Health– Maryland Interested Parties Advisory Group– Establishment

House and Government Operations

March 3, 2025

My name is Isata Kabba and I am a member of the National Domestic Workers Alliance. I've been a direct care worker for 17 years, and this work means everything to me. It all started when I took care of my grandmother back in Africa, and from there, I decided to pursue this career. Over the years, I've earned my CNA certification, learned CPR, first aid, and safety precautions, and gained experience with patients dealing with dementia, Parkinson's, and end-of-life care.

But my favorite part about my job is the relationships I build with my patients. In this job, you often connect with patients in other ways than just words. Sometimes, my patients can only communicate through their eyes. When you form that bond, it makes you reflect on who will take care of you when you need it. This job requires patience, calm, and kindness—qualities that I am proud of.

However, the challenges are real. We don't always have security in this job. Direct care workers are underpaid—agencies typically start at around \$15 per hour and for that pay, we work long, emotionally draining hours. I have to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet. I haven't had a vacation in two years, and I can't afford time off when I'm sick. The job is too much for the compensation we receive.

On top of that, agencies often ignore the difficulties we face. Sometimes our safety is at risk, family members try to tell us how to do our jobs, and our patients have conditions like dementia that require us to de-escalate tough situations. We often get no support from our agencies on how to deal with these situations.

But despite all of this, I've seen the difference I make. I once worked with a patient who had been depressed after losing her son. When I met her, she was completely non-verbal and her home had been completely neglected. But as I worked with her and gained her trust through the care I gave her, she started opening up to me and started living her life again.

I believe home care workers need a voice because no one understands our job like we do. We are on the front lines, providing essential care, and we deserve to be heard. Our patients are Medicaid recipients, but even though the Maryland government supports the Medicaid program, they do not hear directly from us on the ground providing the care – only our employers/agencies. We need better wages, security, and recognition for the vital work we do. If our working conditions improve, I know we can offer even better care to our patients. We deserve a seat at the table to shape the future of home care, especially the Medicaid payment rates that determine our wages and benefits on the job. For these reasons, I urge the committee to vote in favor of HB1142 the Interest Parties Advisory Group so home care workers have a voice in the decisions that impact us. Thank you.

Submitted via:

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/MyMGATracking/WitnessSignup>