



Testimony - SB 804, Labor and Employment - Occupational Safety and Health -
Revisions to Heat Stress Standards
Unfavorable
Senate Finance Committee
March 11, 2026
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Honorable Chairwoman Beidle & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents school employees, childcare providers, higher education workers, and public service employees across Maryland. Many of our members work in environments where heat exposure is a real and growing concern—such as school maintenance staff, custodial workers, grounds crews, and other essential support staff who keep our public institutions running. Protecting workers from dangerous heat conditions is critical, especially as climate change increases the frequency of extreme heat events.

Maryland recently implemented strong heat stress protections through the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) Heat Stress Standards, which took effect in September 2024. These standards were developed through extensive stakeholder engagement and are based on well-established scientific guidance. They provide clear, enforceable safeguards to prevent heat-related illness and injury in the workplace.

Unfortunately, Senate Bill 804 would weaken these protections in several important ways.

First, the bill removes clear minimum rest break requirements that currently protect workers during high heat conditions. Under the existing MOSH standard, workers must receive at least 10 minutes of rest every two hours when the heat index exceeds 90 degrees and 15 minutes every hour when it exceeds 100 degrees, unless an employer demonstrates equivalent protection through other measures.

SB 804 eliminates these minimum requirements and instead allows employers to determine their own rest schedules without any baseline standard.

Without enforceable minimums, rest breaks become discretionary and reactive rather than proactive, increasing the risk of heat illness.

Second, the bill replaces the heat index standard currently used by MOSH with a measurement based only on temperature. The heat index accounts for both temperature and humidity, which is particularly important in Maryland's humid climate. By relying only on temperature, SB 804 would narrow when protections apply and expose workers to dangerous conditions even when the heat index indicates significant risk.

Third, SB 804 weakens acclimatization protections for workers newly exposed to heat. The current MOSH standard requires a monitored acclimatization period of up to 14 days for workers returning to hot environments. This is critical because the majority of heat-related deaths occur during a worker's first week of exposure.

The bill instead gives employers broad discretion to determine acclimatization schedules and removes required monitoring during this high-risk period.

Finally, the bill introduces new exemptions for "temporary and unanticipated heat conditions," such as equipment failure or emergencies. These exemptions could leave workers unprotected in precisely the situations where they may be least prepared for extreme heat exposure.

Maryland took an important step forward in 2024 by adopting strong heat stress protections that reflect scientific guidance and best practices. Rather than weakening these standards before they have had sufficient time to be evaluated, the State should allow them to remain in place and ensure they are properly implemented and enforced.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges the Committee to give Senate Bill 804 an unfavorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.