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HB 724 - Employment Discrimination - Caregiver Status
House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
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FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the committee. My name is Theresa Robertson. I am a resident of Howard County and a member of the AARP Maryland volunteer advocacy team. I am here today to express our strong support for House Bill 724, the caregiver employment discrimination bill. I want to thank Delegate Lopez for introducing this important legislation.

To start my testimony, I want to say first and foremost, **caregiving is leadership.**

A family caregiver is not someone who's unreliable or checked out.

Caregivers are managing a lot. They're coordinating doctors' appointments, keeping track of medications, handling emergencies, making decisions on the fly, all while showing up at work and doing a good job.

This requires time management skills, the ability to prioritize, and the ability to work under pressure.

And honestly, those are the kinds of people most of us want on our teams.

But here's the problem.

Many caregivers don't feel safe telling their employer what's going on.

They're afraid that if someone finds out they're caring for a parent, spouse, or child, they'll be seen as a liability.

So, they hide it.

I remember when I was a new caregiver, I would hide in closets or in my car to take calls from my husband's doctor, hoping nobody noticed, because I was trying to keep my job while also taking care of my husband. In my early years, instead of speaking up, I stayed quiet.

Because discrimination doesn't always look like someone getting fired on the spot. Sometimes it looks like being reassigned. Sometimes it looks like not being given the kinds of projects that

help you grow. Sometimes it's being slowly pushed out of opportunities because of a perceived liability.

That is caregiver discrimination, and that shouldn't be happening.

And I want to say this clearly: **Employers should want caregivers.**

Caregivers know how to work under pressure. They know how to manage details. They know how to solve problems. They're some of the most capable, resourceful people you'll ever meet. They understand how important a steady job is, because employment is often what makes it possible for them to keep their loved ones at home and stable.

And this isn't just a personal issue; caregiver employment discrimination affects all of us. When caregivers lose their jobs because they don't have support or they face discrimination, they often end up needing more government assistance, from Medicaid, social services, or even emergency support.

Supporting caregivers isn't just the kind thing to do; it's also the smart thing to do. It helps businesses retain good employees, and it helps communities stay stronger. We need employers to have more awareness and more tools to support caregivers, like connecting them to local resources or offering flexibility or accommodations when it makes sense.

Because caregiving is not rare. Every one of us will deal with it at some point, and every workplace will be touched by it.

HB 724 is about fairness, about making sure caregivers aren't punished for doing something we all may have to do one day.

Thank you so much for listening, and I hope you'll support HB 724.

For additional follow-up, please contact Sara Westrick, AARP Maryland Advocacy Director at swestrick@arp.org or 410-310-0374.