



**COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLUSTER**

February 17, 2026

Delegate Melissa Wells
Chair, Government, Labor and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB724 (Employment Discrimination - Caregiver Status)

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson Wells and Members of the House Government Labor and Elections Committee,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women, I request your support for HB724 (Employment Discrimination - Caregiver Status). We support this bill because it will close a gap in Maryland law that leaves caregivers—the majority of whom are women—vulnerable to workplace bias that reduces their employment opportunities and economic security.

HB724 would amend the Maryland Fair Employment Practices Act (MFEPA) to add “caregiver status” as a protected trait, making it unlawful for employers to discriminate in hiring, firing, compensation, or other terms or conditions of employment based on caregiving responsibilities. The MFEPA currently protects all individuals from employment discrimination based on their race, sex, marital status, age, religion, national origin, disability and several other traits, but does not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on a worker’s role in providing care for family members, children, or dependents. Similar to the New York City law it is modeled after, HB724 defines a “caregiver” as a person who provides direct and ongoing care for either a minor child or a care recipient. A “care recipient” is a person with a disability who relies on the caregiver for medical care or assistance with daily living, including a caregiver’s child, spouse, domestic partner, parent, sibling, grandchild, grandparent, parent-in-law, or any other individual in a familial relationship that the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights recognizes.

Caregivers often face denied promotions, reduced hours, or hiring discrimination based on stereotyped assumptions about their “flexibility,” availability and commitment to their workplaces. This type of discrimination is often based on an unfounded belief that the family caregiver is less dedicated to their job or less valuable as an employee, regardless of their actual job performance. Similar views historically have reduced women’s employment opportunities based on stereotypical assumptions about their roles and responsibilities within their families. Existing leave laws offer protection only for limited periods of time, and do not address the reality of workers who are not hired in the first place or lose out on promotions because of bias against their status as caregivers.

Research shows that such “family responsibilities discrimination” or “caregiver status” disproportionately impacts women, single parents, and employees of color, who are more likely to bear caregiving responsibilities. According to a Harvard Kennedy School Study, mothers in the workforce experience additional disadvantages compared to women who are not mothers, including a per-child wage penalty. The study found that the “motherhood penalty” may account for a significant proportion of the gender gap in pay, and that the pay gap between mothers and non-mothers could in fact be larger than the pay gap between men and women.

All Marylanders would benefit from passing HB724. A 2020 AARP study determined that one in every six Americans provides care for a family member over 50, and 82% of Americans who care for both an elderly person and a minor child are also employed.

According to the Center for Worklife Law, over 250 states, cities or counties have laws that make employment discrimination based on family responsibilities or caregiver status illegal. Maryland should join these jurisdictions in adding a missing layer of workplace protections beyond the patchwork of current laws that do not directly address the problem of discrimination based on caregiver status. By enacting HB714, Maryland would join its neighboring Washington D.C., New York City, and states like Delaware and California in ensuring equal employment opportunity and economic security for all workers, regardless of family structure or caregiving role.

The Commission’s strategic priorities include advocating for laws that promote financial security for women, and particularly benefit low-income women in underserved communities. This bill furthers our goals, and we urge this Committee’s support for HB724.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jode Denis".

Commissioner
Montgomery County Commission for Women