



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH COMMITTEE

HB1414: Nursing Homes- Direct Care Wages and Benefits and Cost Reports

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. It believes that all Maryland residents should have access to affordable, quality health care. It is also committed to improving equity, which involves increasing justice and fairness within institutions, as well as in their distribution of resources. **The League thus supports HB1414: Nursing Homes- Direct Care Wages and Benefits and Cost Reports, which would improve the financial transparency of nursing homes, and require that an increased percentage of their revenue be spent on direct care workers' wages and benefits.**

"Direct care workers represent the paid frontline of support for millions of older people and people with disabilities. Yet, despite their profound value, these workers struggle in poor-quality jobs, which drives many of them away from these roles."¹ **Recruitment and retention for these demanding, high-stress jobs is hampered by inadequate wages and benefits, difficult working conditions, and recent changes in immigration policies. (Roughly one in five front line nursing home workers are immigrants).**²

Per the Washington Post:³ **"Black women are more overrepresented in health-care jobs than any other demographic groups, and are concentrated in the lowest-paid and most dangerous roles....Black women are more likely to work in those nursing homes and other long-term care settings that are most understaffed and under-resourced, leading to greater risk and exposure to injury or infection....But while Black women do some of the hardest work in healthcare, their paychecks don't reflect it."**

The direct care workforce shortage must be addressed now, as it will only worsen as Maryland's population ages. In 2022, 16% of Maryland residents, or almost a million people, were age 65 or older. By 2040 that age group is expected to grow to 21% of our population, or 1.44 million residents. The subgroup of people 80 years or older should double to almost half a million, or 7% of our population.⁴ **Preparations must be made now to grow the direct care workforce, reduce turnover, and relieve staffing shortages, to enable this fast-growing population to receive the quality care to which they are entitled.**

SB 663 would mandate an equitable wage increase to the healthcare workers providing direct patient care to the elderly, disabled, and chronically ill residents of nursing homes. Their important, difficult, and physically-demanding work enables residents to maintain the best possible quality of life and highest level of independence. **The League and its 2,000 members urge a favorable report on House Bill 1414.**

¹ <https://www.phinational.org/caringforthefuture/>

² https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w34791/w34791.pdf

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/02/24/black-women-health-care-jobs/>

⁴ <https://www.retirementlivingsourcebook.com/proagingnews/maryland-s-aging-population-urgent-housing-needs-highlighted-in-2025-assessment#:~:text=Maryland's%20older%20adults%20already%20represent,to%207%25%20of%20the%20population>