



Testimony for HB 1129

Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Provider Agencies - Wages and Leave for Personal Care Aides

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Bagnall and members of the House Health Committee,

My name is Ricarra Jones and I am the Political Director at 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East in Maryland/DC. 1199SEIU is the largest healthcare union in the nation, and here in Maryland we have over 10,000 members working in hospitals, long term care settings, and federally qualified health centers. 1199 SEIU is a proud partner of the Caring Across Maryland coalition which consists of direct care workers, patients, loved ones, and advocates who are committed to improving the long-term care infrastructure in Maryland through bolstering job quality for care workers, protecting quality of care, and increasing access to affordable long-term care.

1199 SEIU supports HB 1129 because bolstering the home care workforce will support the workforce through the entire care continuum. Discharging hospital patients from our overburdened and understaffed hospitals is a persistent challenge in Maryland. Staffing shortages in post-acute settings are also causing it difficult for Marylanders to receive needed rehabilitative and long-term care. As more Marylanders prefer to receive their care at home, the same staffing challenges are underscored in home care. In comparison to other healthcare worker titles, personal care aides have some of the lowest wages which cause pronounced retention and recruitment challenges. Without HB 1229 will be foundational to improving the retention of personal care aides in Maryland and ensure Marylanders have ample access to home care services.

As Maryland's aging population grows, the demand for the services of home health aides and personal care aides will continue to increase. The demand is demonstrated by Maryland's Medicaid Waiver waitlist for home and community-based services which is the

third longest in the country with over 26,000 residents waiting for home care services. Despite the increasing demand and essential nature of home care, the caregiving work of personal care aides is still not valued- workers receive extremely low pay, few benefits and enjoy limited protections. Home care workers are still earning as low as \$15 per hour with very little job security. In Maryland, there are approximately 51,200 direct care workers, the majority of whom are Black and women of color.

Quality care for aging and disabled individuals begins with a supported workforce. Low wages leads to high turnover, burn out, and interruption in care for those who need it. The only way to face the workforce crisis and stabilize our long term care system is to pay workers a living wage. Additionally, personal care aides should have the right to tend to their own care needs and not jeopardize the health of their clients.

HB 1229 is in line with federal CMS guidelines to ensure 80% of Medicaid dollars is spent on direct care workforce compensation by 2030. RSAs receive about \$25.58 per hour from Medicaid to provide personal care services. Using the 80/20 standard, employers in Maryland can afford to pay their employees \$17 per hour and meet their employer obligations (wages, benefits +employer share of taxes) now.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 1229.

Sincerely,

Ricarra Jones
Political Director
1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East