

# NATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS ALLIANCE

## Comments in Support of HB1129

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

Health Committee

March 3, 2026

Dear Chair Bagnall and members of the committee,

My name is Emilia Balah and I have been a direct care worker for one year. I am writing in support of HB 1129 and to express a favorable position. Maryland needs to take proactive steps to address the direct care workforce crisis and that begins with addressing low wages and the lack of benefits. HB 1129 puts meaningful steps in place to create higher standards for personal care aides and should be seriously considered by your committee.

Taking care of elderly people has always been my passion. I know that one day I, too, will grow old, and it gives me deep fulfillment to care for those who have served and helped build this nation. Many of my clients are sick or incapacitated and unable to do basic daily activities. My greatest joy is seeing them happy, comfortable, and well cared for. That is why I chose this profession.

Even though I live in Maryland, I work in Washington, DC because the wages in DC are better. In DC, I earn \$20.95 per hour, and in some cases up to \$24.68 per hour. Unfortunately, Maryland does not offer comparable pay. Because of this, many of us are forced to leave our own communities to earn a livable wage.

The commute to DC is not easy, especially during the winter months. Traveling long distances in the cold, already physically tired, is very challenging. If I were able to work in Maryland at fair wages, it would make a tremendous difference in my life. I would not have to leave my state to support myself. I would be able to serve my own community and reduce the physical and emotional stress of constant travel.

There have been times when I have gone to work sick because I could not afford to take a day off. We need the money to pay our bills. Some companies in DC make it very difficult to take sick leave. If you call out sick, they may say you did not give enough notice or tell you to find your own replacement. It creates fear and pressure. We do not stay home because we want to – we stay home only when we truly need rest.

Rest is essential. If a caregiver is sick or exhausted and cannot take time to recover,

we cannot give our clients the best care. Sometimes rest heals more than medication. Direct care workers cannot continue working without breaks and expect to produce the best results. When we are supported, our clients receive better, safer care.

Maryland seniors and people with disabilities deserve high-quality, reliable care—and that will only be possible when direct care jobs are treated as the essential, professional roles they are. Persistent turnover in the direct care workforce directly affects the consistency and quality of care clients receive. I want the opportunity to work in my home state and to give back to my own community. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of HB1129. Thank you for your consideration.

*Submitted via:*

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/MyMGATracking/WitnessSignup>