



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1326 (Delegate Dumais)
Maryland Healthy Working Families Act – Revisions and Public Health Emergency Leave
FAVORABLE**

March 2, 2021

Dear Chairman Davis and members of the Economic Matters Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of House Bill 1326. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We urge you to support this legislation guaranteeing sick and safe during in the largest public health crisis of our time.

Exemptions and stipulations in state law have prevented agricultural workers, temporary workers, on-call health professionals – many of these people in essential roles – and those working for companies with 500 or more employees from taking any sick leave at all during the course of the pandemic. The expiration of the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act provides no compensatory relief to those left out by state legislation – those who need sick or safe leave the most are left with absolutely no legal protections. Given the racial disparities in COVID-19 testing and treatment, continual surges in cases during flu and cold season, limited access to healthcare, and virtual learning challenges for parents, this is unsafe, unjust, and a simply unacceptable.

Many of the sick and safe leave exemptions target professions and sectors comprised disproportionately of Black and Brown essential workers, who are routinely exposed to the public and the threat of COVID-19 and face [far worse health outcomes](#) than their White counterparts. For all workers, HB 1326 would 14 more days of paid emergency sick leave during a public health emergency, allowing time to isolate or quarantine as outlined in public health guidelines. Ensuring sick and safe leave, especially during this crisis, exists within the larger mandate for racial justice and fair, equitable labor reform.

As businesses struggle with the effects of the recession and unforeseen costs related to COVID-19, personal protective equipment, and changing programming and services, there is hesitancy to spend resources on sick and safe leave. But study after study shows that when

info@strongfuturemd.org

PO Box 164 | Arnold MD 21012

240-643-0024 | strongfuturemd.org

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employees feel supported through illness, recovery, and their personal lives, they are [more productive](#) when working and express higher sentiments of loyalty to their place of work with little to no costs to employers.

By expanding Maryland's sick protections to cover more workers and provide for paid public health emergency leave, HB 1326 establishes a landscape for Maryland's stronger and healthier future for businesses and workers. For these reasons, we support a favorable report on HB 1326.

John B. King Jr.
Founder and Board Chair

Alice Wilkerson
Executive Director