



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**HB 923 – Labor and Employment – Worker Safety and Health – Injury and Illness
Prevention Program
House Economic Matters Committee
March 5, 2021**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 923 – Labor and Employment – Worker Safety and Health – Injury and Illness Prevention Program. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

Surveying Maryland's existing workplace safety laws and procedures reveals a dearth of good policies that, if implemented, would decrease injuries and illnesses for workers. And, in these unprecedented times, with no statewide Emergency Temporary Standard in place and a shifting landscape of State and Local Executive Orders related to COVID-19, the cracks in our workplace safety laws are fully revealed, showing the need for stronger policies to protect workers.

HB 923 mandates the establishment of health and safety committees for businesses with 10 or more employees, as well as requiring them to have written injury and illness prevention plans. Fourteen other states already mandate injury and illness prevention programs, and 11 states mandate health and safety committees, including our next door neighbor, West Virginia. These are not new concepts, and they are paramount to ensuring a safer and more productive workplace.

We strongly support Health and Safety Committees, with the full participation of workers. Those who are most affected by the decisions of industry should have a seat at the table when it comes to defining a safe vs. unsafe work environment or policy. Workplace injuries are preventable, and those who can best define where the problems exist are the ones who work everyday creating the value for any business: The Worker.

The decisions of these committees have no bearing on workplace safety without also requiring written illness and prevention plans that can be reviewed and measured for success. The workers

and management need to be able to work together towards a safer workplace and produce written records – reviewable and reportable by MOSH – of the steps they have taken to do so, as well as their record of success with a written and executed safety plan.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2019, 64,900 cases of Marylanders suffering work-related injuries, leading to a combined 25,600 missed days of work. Workplace injuries are preventable, but only if there are strong policies in place – and a coalition of workers and management striving for the same goal greater workplace safety – to mitigate these injuries and illnesses.

We ask for a favorable report on HB 923.