



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1326**  
Maryland Healthy Working Families Act – Revisions and Public Health Emergency  
Leave  
Economic Matters Committee

**Paulina Arnold, On Behalf of CASA**

**March 2, 2021**

Honorable Chairman Davis and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

**CASA is pleased to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1326.** CASA is the largest membership-based immigrant rights organization in Maryland and in the Mid-Atlantic region, with a membership of over 100,000 Black and Brown immigrants and working families. This legislation is critical to ensure that CASA members, and all Maryland workers, are able to take the essential sick leave necessary to protect their workplaces and communities during an emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many CASA members have contracted COVID-19 and been unable to take paid sick or quarantine leave. In Maryland, 25% of all healthcare workers are immigrants.<sup>1</sup> Despite being exposed on the front lines of the pandemic, many health care workers have been excluded from protection under either Maryland law or the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. When these workers are unable to take paid sick or quarantine leave, they must face a choice between losing money and potentially their job or exposing their patients and coworkers.

Bisrat,<sup>2</sup> a CASA member from Montgomery County, Ethiopian immigrant and registered nurse, was working at an urgent care at the beginning of the pandemic. After being exposed to COVID-19, she received a test and told her employer that she had to quarantine until her test results came back. Her employer told her to report to work and, when she refused, she was fired. Her test result came back positive. Bisrat's courageous decision to quarantine at home likely prevented further infection among her coworkers and patients, but was not protected under Maryland or federal law.

HB 1326 would protect workers like Bisrat during a public health emergency. Our medical workers deserve the same access to sick leave as all workers as they must put

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<sup>1</sup> New American Economy Research Fund, *Immigrant Healthcare Workers Are Critical in the Fight Against Covid-19*, Figure 1 (Apr. 9, 2020), <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/covid-19-immigrant-healthcare-workers/>

<sup>2</sup> Name changed to protect privacy.

themselves at unique risk every day. These workers are disproportionately Black and Brown, and their repeated exposure without adequate protection contributes to the disparate impact the public health emergency has had upon communities of color.

With the expiry of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, all Maryland workers are in Bisrat's position, without access to quarantine leave when they are exposed to or contract COVID-19. It is essential to codify sick leave protections into Maryland law so that employers are familiar with the provisions and understand employer obligations during a public health emergency.

CASA members, as immigrant workers, are on the frontlines providing essential services to Marylanders. HB 1326 would protect these workers, their workplaces, and the Maryland community by allowing them to take the sick leave necessary during a dangerous pandemic.

**For all of these reasons, CASA supports HB 1326 and urges a favorable report from the committee.**

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