



Testimony on SB761
Funding for Wage Increases for Medical Provider Workers
Position: **FAVORABLE**

To Chair Guzzone and Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee,

My name is Reeba McKenny. I'm a healthcare worker at a Long-Term Care facility in Baltimore, and a Delegate in 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the country, with over 10,000 members in Maryland & DC. As a healthcare worker and a union member, I support SB761 and urge the committee to vote **favorably** on this bill to raise wages for healthcare workers like me.

My coworkers and I are in crisis. We are fighting two battles, one against COVID19 and the other against short staffing. These two problems amplify each other, creating a vicious cycle for healthcare workers and our patients. **Long-Term Care facilities are not recruiting or retaining enough healthcare workers, and it all boils down to staff being underpaid and overworked.**

One of my jobs is conducting job interviews for potential employees. I've been in numerous interviews with candidates who loved the facility but turned down job offers on the spot because of the low wages. In addition to the insufficient pay rate, we have our deductibles taken out of our paychecks, leaving us with little left over to survive on.

So many healthcare workers have quit since the pandemic began because the sacrifices to their health and wellbeing were not worth the wages we earn. From the time this pandemic started, it has always felt like nursing home workers were put on the back burner. We didn't receive any raises or hazard pay, even though so many of the COVID19 outbreaks and deaths were occurring in Long-Term Care facilities. It hurt our mental health to not receive the same recognition and compensation that other frontline healthcare workers did.

As healthcare workers, our jobs don't end when we clock out of our shift because we bring these crises home with us. I'm a mother, a sister, and a wife. I love my family dearly. After I get home from working a 12–16 hour shift, as many of us do, I'm exhausted. I have no energy leftover after work to help my children with their homework and I'm late getting dinner on the table for them, if I'm able to cook at all. Now that I'm so tired, I have to order delivery a lot and it's costing me more money than we can afford but of course I'm going to do what I must to put food on my family's table.

The COVID19 pandemic, made worse by short staffing, has forced me to make sacrifices I never wanted to make. This pandemic has robbed me of so much joy I used to have. I've had COVID19 twice and am still experiencing the damaging effects to my lungs months after I "recovered." I've always loved singing and I have a beautiful singing voice, but now I can't even sing anymore because of the damage COVID19 caused to my lungs. Both times I had COVID19, I exposed my family and they got sick too. As a mother it was so challenging to care for myself and my children while we all had COVID19. It took such a mental toll on all of us.

My siblings and I lost our parents, and since then my house has become our family home where we gather for meals, holidays, and everything else. This year, I couldn't have any of our family over for Christmas, and I missed my granddaughter's third birthday because my household had COVID19 at the time. It was absolutely heartbreaking for my whole family that we were not be able to spend time together for the holidays and to celebrate my granddaughter turning three.

We're going into year three of dealing with COVID19 and I can say with confidence that these last few months have been the absolute worst of the pandemic. Healthcare workers are getting sick and burning out. We never have fully staffed facilities anymore so we can't provide the high-quality care our patients deserve. Short staffing makes the residents suffer as much as it makes healthcare workers suffer.

NOW is the time to our raise wages. We can't keep working short staffed and we can't keep sacrificing time with our families because of the pandemic and burnout. **I did not sign up to put my life on the line; I signed up to give care!** Please vote **yes** on this bill.

Sincerely,
Reeba McKenny
Delegate, 1199SEIU
Baltimore City Resident