



Testimony to the House Health and Government Operations Committee
HB462 Funding for Wages and Benefits for Nursing Home Workers (Nursing Home Staffing Crisis Funding Act of 2024)
Position: Favorable

1/31/2024

The Honorable Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Pena-Melnyk and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Zoe Gallagher and I am a Policy Associate at Economic Action Maryland. Economic Action Maryland (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) is a people-centered movement to expand economic rights, housing justice, and community reinvestment for working families, low-income communities, and communities of color. Economic Action Maryland provides direct assistance today while passing legislation and regulations to create systemic change in the future. As a large part of our work is centered around helping older adults in Maryland through our Securing Older Adults with Resources (SOAR) program.

I am writing today to urge you to vote favorably toward HB462, which would require the Governor's proposed budget to include an 8% reimbursement rate increase for providers of certain healthcare services, in order to improve wages among direct care workers.

Homecare workers and nursing home staff are leaving the industry at an alarming rate, as many are overworked and underpaid, leading to a vast shortage in care providers at nursing home facilities. A shortage of nurses means lower quality of care, leading to more error and higher mortality rates¹. Thousands of older adults in Maryland rely on this industry for care, and as the aging population continues to grow rapidly in our state, it is imperative that we address this issue promptly and comprehensively to ensure the sustained well-being of Maryland's seniors.

Investing in higher wages for nursing home workers is not just an ethical imperative; it is also a strategic move for the state of Maryland. Adequate compensation serves as a powerful incentive to attract and retain skilled and compassionate individuals in the caregiving profession. By raising the reimbursement rate for healthcare services, particularly for those directly involved in the care of seniors, we can mitigate the current workforce shortage. A well-compensated and stable workforce is crucial for maintaining high-quality care standards, reducing turnover, and ultimately improving the overall health outcomes for Maryland's older population. Moreover, it can lead to increased job satisfaction, resulting in a more dedicated and motivated workforce that positively impacts the well-being of our seniors, fosters a healthier community, and ultimately reduces the strain on the healthcare system. Allocating resources to uplift nursing home workers financially is an investment in the long-term health and resilience of our state's aging population.

¹<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK493175/#:~:text=Nursing%20shortages%20lead%20to%20errors,patient%2Dto%2Dnurse%20ratios.>



For these reasons, we urge the committee to support HB462.

Sincerely,
Zoe Gallagher, Policy Associate