



House Bill 581

*Labor and Employment - Employment Standards During an Emergency
(Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act)*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Economic Matters and Appropriations
Committees

Date: February 5, 2021

From: Drew Jabin

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 581. This bill would create several new programs and employer mandates on counties during a declared state of emergency. The economic impact of COVID-19 is unprecedented, and this legislation would cause an extremely costly, burdensome imposition on county governments.

HB 581 would require counties to pay additional hazard pay, implement a new program for bereavement and health leave, reimburse employee healthcare costs, and allow employees the right to refuse to work. Section 3-1605 includes a provision allowing an essential worker the decision-making power to decide not to work, without review. For the public sector, many employees fulfill functions that are truly "essential" and may be pressed into service to respond to the very emergencies triggering these protections. Empowering necessary public employees with a "veto" on work responsibilities could jeopardize the safety and welfare of Marylanders.

Also concerning is the broad, vague definition of "emergency" contained within the bill. As written, an "emergency" could be interpreted several ways, and could unreasonably subject counties to all the costly, burdensome provisions mentioned above.

While counties understand the intent of providing essential employees comfort and safety during an emergency, this bill mandates costly, burdensome programs and could compromise local governments' ability to respond to urgent service needs for the larger community. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **UNFAVORABLE** report on **HB 581**.