

March 8, 2021

RE: **Support for Maryland Senate Bill 756**
Workers' Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumptions – COVID-19

To the Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Scott Goldstein, and I am the director of litigation and a senior manager at Saiontz & Kirk, P.A. Our law firm represents workers throughout Maryland who have suffered injuries in the course of their employment, and we have been a vocal member of the Maryland legal community for more than 50 years. Today I write in support of Maryland Senate Bill 756, which would provide access to important medical, wage loss and financial protections for permanent impairments that result from COVID-19, for individuals who placed their health and safety at risk to work as public servants and front-line workers since the coronavirus pandemic emerged last year.

Many of these brave men and women throughout Maryland, who serve as healthcare workers, firefighters, police, paramedics and provided other critical services throughout the pandemic, have contracted COVID-19 infections that left them with severe and often permanent injuries. The rates of COVID-19 have clearly proven to be substantially higher among front-line workers compared to other members of society, who were able to stay in their homes, work remotely and engage in social distancing recommended by state and federal officials.¹

Given the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, it would be unfair and unjust to place the burden on these front-line workers of establishing that they contracted this injury during the course of their employment. As with other protections provided under Maryland Workers' Compensation law, this presumption will be a rebuttable by the employer/insurer. However, without this presumption, many, if not most, front-line workers will be left without critical protections they need and deserve for future medical expenses and disability that resulted from COVID-19.

¹ Nguyen LH, et al. "Risk of COVID-19 among frontline healthcare workers and the general community: a prospective cohort study." Preprint. medRxiv. 2020;2020.04.29.20084111. Published 2020 May 25. doi:10.1101/2020.04.29.20084111. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7273299/>;

Mellen, Taylor. "Health-Care Workers Make up 1 in 7 Covid-19 Cases Recorded Globally, WHO Says." The Washington Post. WP Company, September 17, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/09/17/health-care-workers-make-up-one-seven-covid-19-cases-recorded-globally-who-says/>.

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Throughout the entire pandemic, front-line workers across Maryland served selflessly, placing their own health and safety at risk every day, so that they might help members of the community, who are in need of protection, rescue, emergency treatments and care for chronic medical conditions. These first responders and public servants continued to serve out of a sense of duty and necessity for the greater public interest. They deserve to know that the Maryland community values the risks they take, and that they have protections under Workers' Compensation law.

Unlike other similar bills proposed this session, Maryland Senate Bill 756 does not set an artificially imposed deadline or start date. It applies equally, to all workers in public safety and healthcare who have faced risks associated with COVID-19 since the pandemic emerged, a little more than a year ago.

These frontline workers are your constituents and neighbors, and as their elected officials it is critical that the same kinds of protections be provided in Maryland that are being considered or enacted in other states nationwide.² Passage and enactment of this bill is appropriate, justified and necessary, providing important access to benefits for workers who deserve that protection.

Very Truly Yours,



Scott B. Goldstein

² Cunningham. "COVID-19: Workers' Compensation." National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), December 9, 2020. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/covid-19-workers-compensation.aspx>.