



February 24, 2021

Dear House Business and Labor Committee:

MNA supports--HB 550- “AN ACT CONFIRMING COVERAGE UNDER WORKERS' COMPENSATION FOR ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES RELATED TO COVID-19; PROVIDING CONDITIONS; APPLYING TO CERTAIN ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE, A RETROACTIVE APPLICABILITY DATE, AND A TERMINATION DATE.”

My name is Vicky Byrd, MSN, RN. I am a Montana Registered Nurse (RN) of 32 years and the CEO of the Montana Nurses Association (MNA). MNA is grateful and appreciative of Representative Olsen bringing forward HB 550 to care for our essential workers which in turn, cares for our communities.

MNA is asking the State Of Montana to support HB 550 and do what makes sense for the essential employees. These essential workers, which have been and remain on their job, all while having risked exposure to one of the most contagious and deadly viruses of our lifetimes, the COVID-19 virus. These workers include but are not limited to those working in energy, teachers, school staff and child care, water and wastewater, agriculture and food production, critical retail (i.e. grocery stores, hardware stores, mechanics), critical trades (construction workers, electricians, plumbers, etc), transportation and nonprofits and social service organizations just to name a few. The bill specifically highlights these workers as follows: *“for the purposes of this section, “essential employee” means a public safety employee, a school employee, or any other employee declared to be an essential employee pursuant to a public health order of the governor or federal directives, provided that the employee was required to work at the physical location of the employment at any time, up to 20 days prior to the diagnosis of covid-19”*.

- Currently, the legislators pushed for limitations on COVID-19 liability for Businesses in Montana of which Governor Gianforte signed into law. What about essential workers and their health risk to themselves and their family providing our communities with much needed essential services? HB 550 addresses this issue and is limited to 10 years, mirroring that which has been proposed and accepted and signed into law for businesses.
- We are appreciative of Representative Olsen’s advocacy asking for Covid-19 to be recognized as an occupational disease for all essential workers and that they can be offered the same protections as they receive from other work related diseases or injuries.
- Many essential workers are expected to go to work and face direct exposure to COVID-19, day in and day out, not to mention the inappropriate backlash many workers received from patrons upset because a business has kindly asked them to don a mask for their safety and the safety of others, trying to keep their businesses open and safe for all. For the small fraction of essential workers who will statistically be saddled with serious long-term effects of COVID-19, through work-based exposure due to their occupation, it makes sense for the



employer to provide this limited coverage for those workers who contract COVID-19 as an occupational disease inside the Worker's Comp Act.

- As COVID-19 is a new disease, we are still learning what long-term impacts may result in some people. Many people contract this disease and health outcomes range from having few symptoms and quickly returning to work, to others experiencing long term health conditions and are unable to work for weeks and months or ever.
- Passage of this bill will allow these essential workers the much needed protection and benefits from long term effects of COVID-19.
- Cost deferment... if not workers compensation, then who, short or long term disability plans or most likely the employer provided health insurance?

Please support all your essential workers as they have been crucial in caring for our needs, vote YES on HB 550.

Respectfully,

Vicky Byrd, MSN, RN

CEO

vicky@mtnurses.org

406-459-2915