

March 9, 2020

For: **Delegate Dereck Davis – Chairman**
House Economic Matters Committee

RE: House Bill 965 (Encourage support and passage)

Dear Delegate Davis & Committee members:

I am Thomas Marsh from Allegany County...I have owned and operated the Chat –N- Chew Restaurant for 46 years.

I attended both minimum wage hearings last year, and spoke against the rise of the minimum wage to \$15.00. **I write to encourage support for House Bill 965, and Senate Bill 862, which would give some relief to the business owners of Allegany and Garrett Counties from the rate of rise and the ultimate level of \$15.00 minimum wage by 2025.**

Last year you ignored the desperate pleas of many business owners who told you that a \$15.00 minimum wage could cost them their assets and force them out of business. **In their wisdom the Allegany and Garrett County Delegation is seeking some relief for their citizens from the unreasonable mandated wage of \$15.00 by 2025. If you respect your colleagues from Western Maryland you will give deference to this local effective legislation and support House Bill 965 and Senate Bill 862 bill as desperately needed.**

Why do we need relief in the rise of the **insane minimum wage** of \$15.00 per hour? I have chosen to number some of my reasons so that they will be easier to understand:

1. Many business owners tried to tell you last year that a \$15.00 minimum wage could threaten the very existence of their businesses.
2. I told you that a 15.00 minimum wage could threaten all of my assets that I have worked for all my life...but you didn't seem to care.
3. I wrote the entire General Assembly members twice...paying \$110.00 in postage each time.
4. On the night of the vote **Delegate Kittleman** actually read part of my letter to the General Assembly...and **Delegate Beitzel** got up and defended my reputation and character.
5. A legislator was quoted in the Baltimore Sun of accusing people like me of crying "woof".
6. Well I'm not crying woof...I'm scared to death as to how I will be able to pay \$15.00 per hour wage...and raise my other good employees above that level to be fair.
7. **Delegate Beitzel's**, and others, pleas and concern about the harm that a \$15.00 wage will bring to small businesses, especially in Western Maryland where West Virginia and Pennsylvania are only a few miles away...went unheeded. Those nearby states are where our business will go if menu prices are raised too much.

8. I employ about 35 employees, three shifts per day, and seven days per week, the effect of a \$15.00 minimum wage on my payroll would be tremendous and very hard to overcome.
9. I told you that the effect of a \$15.00 wage on my payroll was over \$317,000.00 per year...and that there was no way that I could find that much profit in my business...and that there was no way to just raise menu prices to offset over \$317,000.00 per year.
10. So how am I to survive?
11. **Melvin Thompson from the Maryland Restaurant Association** has been out to my restaurant. He stated that he could almost stand on my parking lot and throw a rock into West Virginia...it was that close!
12. West Virginia's minimum wage is \$8.75...how am I supposed to be able to complete and stay in business...while struggling to pay a \$15.00 minimum wage?
13. If I raise menu prices too much my customers will just spend their money in West Virginia.
14. I have faced, fought, and survived, a lot of adversaries in the 46 years of owning and running my business; a lot of independent restaurants, and even the big ones like McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Dairy Queen, and they all are located right across the Potomac River in Keyser West Virginia about a mile or so from my restaurant.
15. But this General Assembly of Maryland, with a \$15.00 minimum wage, has given me the biggest adversary that I have faced in 46 years...and one that I do not know how to deal with.
16. **This uncaring and oblivious General Assembly has made my home state of Maryland my number one enemy that I have faced in 46 years of trying to remain successfully in business.**
17. You should be seriously considering totally repealing the 15.00 wage and lowering it for Allegany and Garrett counties to no more than about \$13.00.
18. The economy of that region of the state is much different out there...and you either don't understand...or you just don't care!
19. I implore you to try to care a little bit...put yourself in my shoes...how would you feel if you owned a restaurant that was only one mile from West Virginia? Quite different I expect!
20. Allegany County has a poverty rate of 16.7 %.
21. 20% of the population is 65 years or over in age.
22. We actually have over 250 homeless people floating around in our county.
23. The median household income is only \$44,065.00...do you want to try to living on that?

24. The schoolboard rammed a school consolidation plan down the people's throats for several years until they finally closed numerous community schools against the known wishes of the small communities...which further exacerbates the decline and deterioration of the small communities...threatening their very existence. (*This is a proven fact*).
25. Now they are bussing children all over the county when in educational circles it is a known fact that school consolidation kills communities and harms children...and with a poverty rate of 16.7% many parents simply cannot get to their children's schools to participate in extracurricular activities and the education of their children. Very sad!
26. The General Assembly is getting ready to spend Billions on education...but in Allegany County our school system loses children every year...as people actually move out of the county. (*This can be verified from the school system that proves the school children numbers have consistently declined each year...and for several years consecutively*).
27. Within the last year they closed what was commonly known as The Westvaco Paper Mill (Verso) in Luke, effectively costing our county around 2,000 jobs...750 jobs within the mill and the rest in related support businesses.
28. The last "smokestack industry" in Allegany County is now gone!
29. Allegany County is an impoverished area.
- 30. Because of the vast difference and poor economies of Allegany and Garrett Counties they deserve relief from the unrealistic \$15.00 minimum wage.**
- 31. Give the business owners out there more time to deal with it...give "deference" to the Allegany and Garrett County Delegation and please support the bills.**

Thoughts in conclusion:

It is not my wish to offend anyone but I must point out this fact, I witnessed Delegate Fennell's testimony last year when she stated that she was the proud sponsor of the bill (*The \$15.00 minimum wage bill*). She stated (*Check the record*) that, "Woman and people of color make up the vast majority of minimum wage workers in Maryland." She further stated, "Racism and sexism have caused woman and people of color to be divided leaving them in low wage professions." She further stated, "Raising the minimum wage to \$15.00 would help reduce both gender and racial gaps." **Sadly, what I did not hear her say was to express any concern at all how such mandated wages would be forced on the backs of business owners all across the state placing them in a position where they may not be able to pay such mandated wages and possibly forcing them into bankruptcy! I feel discriminated against because my dictatorial government has now mandated that I pay wages that I simply cannot afford.**

Here is another side of the story for you to consider, I found my dad dead on the floor when I was only ten years old and my mom and I started trying to survive on a social security check that I remember as not being much more than a hundred dollars per month. It took help from my older brothers and sisters to get along...**so I do know what it is like to be poor!** My first job was shining shoes in the local shoe shop when

I was 12 years old...and I was paid \$2.50 per week. **So, I too, have struggled to pay my basic necessities for most of my life!**

The tragic mistake that has now been made by the legislators is that supporters of the \$15.00 minimum wage have tried to make the minimum wage a **“living wage”** and it was never meant to be such. Minimum wage jobs, for the most part, are entry level jobs where a lot of people work themselves up to better paying jobs. **Governor Hogan tried to inform the legislators of a study that stated, “Raising the minimum wage would cost the state over a hundred thousand jobs”...but no one seemed to even care! The legislature just steamrolled over his veto and went on...without expressing any concern about the business owners that were scared to death that a \$15.00 wage would force them out of business!**

So I ask state lawmakers, what are the citizens supposed to do when they are afflicted by uncaring representatives who have ulterior motives of passing legislation designed to help woman and people of color, but the end result will be to force business owners all across the state into bankruptcies and out of business, costing them all of their assets that they have worked hard for all of their lives? **The citizens of Maryland should not have to fear a dictatorial government that sets wages so high that it puts employers out of business!**

In my home community of Westernport I have fought the school board over unwanted school consolidation for over 30 years. I have repeatedly witnessed the school board trample on the rights of the citizens in blatant arbitrary action and in total disregard of what the citizens actually wanted. **I have actually acted as my own attorney in an appeal to the State Board of Education...and found the State Board of Education in Circuit Court “guilty of being arbitrary and capricious and in error of law”...but in the end the elected officials do whatever they want to and the desires of the citizens go unfilled!**

So, sadly, after so many years of struggling with elected officials for justice, from the Governor’s office on down to the school board, I have come to this conclusion, **the citizens do not really have a free society any longer! We are simply allowed to have the “illusion” of a free society...so long as we abide by all of the unnecessary and unwanted laws that are endlessly passed by the General Assembly every year.** Oh, and that also includes paying all of the taxes, fees, and fines that go along with abiding by the laws **that control us!** **The General Assembly is the “ruling class” and the citizens are just the subjects...allowed to have the “illusion” of a free society!**

Now, let us see what you are up to this year? Over 1700 bills have been dropped into the hopper, many of them would be laws that the citizens do not need or want...**ridiculous!** You already passed a law making Styrofoam dinner trays illegal. Now you want to make plastic bags and plastic straws illegal. Is this the most important thing that you can come up with at the level of the State’s great General Assembly...making plastic straws illegal...give me a break! **I don’t know what you have against the restaurant business...why don’t you try leaving us alone. I have an idea...why don’t you just make running a restaurant illegal...then everyone can just go eat in West Virginia or Pennsylvania.**

One of my favorite quotes can be found in the Constitution of Maryland and states, “**Non-resistance against arbitrary power and oppression is absurd...slavish...and destructive of the good and happiness of mankind.**” This I believe...therefore I fight for justice!

Your conscientious consideration would be most appreciated.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Marsh

Thomas R. Marsh – Owner

Chat –N- Chew Restaurant

McCoole MD.

Cell 301-876-0100

CC: All members of the General Assembly.

P.S. Wouldn't it be nice to come to The General Assembly some year and put your feet up on your desk and say, “Wow...we have nothing to do...no more laws need to be passed!”