

Testimony of Debbie Tang, Partner, Bridge Partners
In SUPPORT of SB 217 Labor and Employment—Wage History and Wage Range
Before the Maryland Senate Finance Committee

February 13, 2020

Thank you for having this hearing and allowing me to testify in support of SB 217, Wage History and Wage Range, an important bill that would prohibit employers from seeking and using a job applicant's salary history to determine pay, a practice that perpetuates the wage gaps women and people of color face in their careers.

I am a partner at Bridge Partners, a minority-owned executive search firm, focused on diversity, inclusion, and equity. We place executives in the C-suite and on boards. Our clients range from Fortune 500 companies to nonprofits and government agencies. I frequently represent clients headquartered in Maryland. Prior to becoming an executive search consultant, I was a practicing attorney at Marriott headquarters in Bethesda, as well law firms in DC. I am also a resident of Bethesda, Maryland and my children go to school in Maryland. My family owns a small business in Rockville- a Chinese restaurant that has proudly served the community for almost 25 years.

As you can see, I am personally and professionally invested in the success of women and people of color in Maryland.

Women and people of color already face unconscious bias in the workplace. Basing someone's current salary on their past salary and making it difficult for applicants to find out what the salary range is for a given position, only perpetuates gender and racial wage gaps. Recognizing this, we have clients who have already adopted policies similar to SB 217 as a best practice even if their city or state has not passed a salary history ban.

Questions about salary history frequently disadvantage women and people of color.

Recently, I was hiring for a position and one of the top candidates was working on Capitol Hill, she was a woman of color. The other top candidate, a white male, was working at a law firm. The company wanted to offer the candidate coming from the Hill less than 2/3 of what the law firm candidate was being offered. Their reasoning was that no one should be able to double or even triple their current salary. We advised the client that salary is based on the duties and responsibilities of the job being

offered. If her experience is equally relevant, her compensation offer should be the same as the other candidate. This is one clear example of how I have seen past salary history used against applicants.

If employers cannot ask questions about current salary or salary history, they can still ask the more important question of someone's salary expectations. Rather than ask, "What is your current compensation?", the employer can ask, "What range of salary are you seeking in your next position?" The employer can then see if the range for the job aligns with the candidates' goals.

When there is no transparency about salary, precious time is wasted. If the candidate's salary expectations and the position's compensation package do not match, we can prevent the scenario of wasting time on multiple rounds of interviews just to discover at the end of the process that the employee would never even consider the salary being offered. It is not a burden to provide a wage range. Every client that hires me must give me a wage range in order for me to properly conduct a search for the right candidate. Businesses typically have a budget, to share it with candidates only serves to streamline the process, because people will take themselves out of consideration if the numbers are not aligned. The range is not set in stone either. As a search unfolds, if you find that your range is not on target with what the market bears, you can change your range.

Each year we mark the day during the year when a woman's pay finally catches up to that of their white, male counterpart. November 20, 2019, was Latina Equal Pay Day. Latinx Women had to work until November of 2019 to catch up with what white men were paid in 2018 alone.

Closing gender and racial pay gaps not only benefit women and people of color in our state, but every child in Maryland – when women are paid fairly, our whole community benefits. As a recruiter focused on placing more women and people of color in the C-suite and on Boards, the salary history ban enables me to better fulfill my company's mission. As a mother of children growing up in Maryland, I want my son and daughter to be equally valued in their future workplace. The wage gap often starts with a woman's first job out of college. I know we all want a better future for the citizens of Maryland.

I urge the members of this Committee to support SB 217.

Thank you.