



SB502: MD Wage and Hour Law
Agricultural Stands, Retail Farms, and Farmers' Markets
Official Testimony
Position: **UNFAVORABLE**

Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Brig Dumais, and I'm a Business Organizer with the Fight for 15 Coalition. I'm extremely disappointed to hear about SB502, a bill gutting the Fight for 15 bill that passed in 2019. A lot of compromises were made in the original Fight for 15 bill that exempted far too many workers already. It's incredibly disheartening that efforts to further weaken the bill are still being pursued, especially because we haven't even reached the \$15/hour minimum wage yet. Adding insult to injury, we are in the middle of a severe pandemic, and agricultural workers are essential workers. Now is the time to pay them *more*, not keep their base wages too low.

As I have said over the last several years, raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour for all workers good for business and spurs much needed economic growth.

- 1) **Workers are consumers too.** If people are not earning a living wage, they are not able to spend money at local businesses because they are living paycheck to paycheck. Raising wages enables low wage workers to support small businesses.
- 2) **Keeping wages low puts small businesses at a competitive disadvantage** because working people will shop based on what they can afford, and bigger businesses tend to have lower prices.
- 3) **Living wages reduce the overall cost of business.** Jobs that pay the lowest wages have the highest turnover rates. Retaining employees long term by paying them living wages ultimately saves money by reducing the costs of recruitment and training-- both of which are costly for business owners. Furthermore, long term employees make fewer mistakes, have increased productivity, and produce less waste, saving businesses owners even more money.
- 4) **Living wages mean better customer service.** In the age of online shopping, one of the things that keeps customers returning to brick-and-mortar stores is high quality customer service.

When workers are less stressed about their income, they are more attentive on the job and more friendly to customers. Workers feel valued when they earn a living wage, and when they feel valued they will contribute more to the success of the business where they work.

5) **Lower poverty rates reduce the strain on social safety-net program.** When workers can't pay their bills, they are often forced to rely on programs like Section 8, SNAP, etc. While it is good to have these programs as a safety net, it is not sustainable for workers to have to rely on them long term, so businesses need to pay their employees enough that they will not need such programs to survive. With COVID19, there is even more strain on safety net programs than before.

Implementing additional carve-outs after the Fight for 15 bill has already passed is a bad precedent that will create a slippery slope to further eroding the \$15/hour minimum wage, leaving more and more working families behind. Our economy is only as strong as the lowest paid worker. When workers are doing well, the economy does well. It's that simple. I strongly urge the Committee to issue an **unfavorable** report on SB502.

With all due respect,

Brig Dumais
Fight for 15 Coalition, Business Organizer
443-243-2078, Brigette.dumais@1199.org