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Capital Area District

Jaime Contreras,
Capital Area District Director



Testimony of Jaime Contreras,

**Executive Vice President and Capital Area District Director, SEIU Local 32BJ,
to the Maryland Senate Finance Committee,**

March 10, 2022

Thank you to the Senate Finance Committee for holding today's hearing. My name is Jaime Contreras and I am the Capital Area District Director and an Executive Vice President of SEIU 32BJ. 32BJ represents over 9,000 workers in Maryland and has 175,000 members up and down the East Coast.

I want to ask you to stand with working Marylanders by voting for SB 721. Maryland is currently on a path to a \$15/hour minimum wage by 2025 for large employers and by 2026 for small employers – that is unless the Board of Public Works decides to delay the planned increases in the minimum wage. Unfortunately, due to rising inflation we cannot wait so long.

Inflation is soaring across the country and in particular in Maryland. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, inflation was at 7% for calendar year 2021 nationwide, but 8% in the Baltimore-Columbia-Towson area.¹ This rate of inflation is the highest in 40 years.² Moreover, we have seen inflation hit certain essentials such as groceries, utilities and housing particularly hard.³ Because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, inflation seems on track to worsen even further. These price increases will have a disproportionately harsh impact on low-income workers, many of whom were also frontline essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are asking you to vote in favor of SB 721 in order to accelerate already planned wage increases and so ensure that Maryland's workers are able to adequately provide for themselves and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jaime Contreras

Executive Vice President and Capital Area District Director

SEIU Local 32BJ

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/consumer-price-index-2021-in-review.htm>;

https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/consumerpriceindex_baltimore.htm

² Id.

³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/where-inflation-is-hitting-hardest-prices-of-groceries-utilities-rent-jump-11644519819>