

HB 549 – Fair Wage Act of 2023 SUPPORT

February 23, 2023

To: The Honorable Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the House Economics Matters Committee

From: Kayla Mock, Political & Legislative Director
United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 400

Dear Chair Wilson and members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony on behalf of our over 10,000 members in Maryland, who have worked the frontlines and have been essential employees in grocery, retail, food distribution, law enforcement, healthcare, and cannabis. Through collective bargaining, our members raise the workplace standards of wages, benefits, safety, and retirement for all workers.

We strongly support HB 549, The Fair Wage Act of 2023 and urge this committee to vote favorably.

The Fight for Fifteen movement began in 2012 when 200 fast food workers walked off their jobs in New York City to demand union rights and a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. The same problems that empowered those fast-food workers to take action in 2012 has amplified the call to raise minimum wage over the last decade: workers cannot afford to live on the current, stagnant minimum wages.

As of January 1, 2023, the minimum wage in Prince George’s County, Maryland is currently \$13.25 an hour; Therefore, a two-person family unit working 40 hours each week would earn approximately \$1,060 a week (\$530 each) and \$55,120 a year (before taxes). According to the Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator – a modest calculator which includes the cost of housing, food, childcare, transportation, healthcare, other necessities, and taxes - a family of three (2 parents and 1 child) would have to earn \$79,551 (or \$6,629 a month) to live in Prince George’s County. This is a prime example of the current minimum wage insufficiently meeting the requirements of working Marylanders in only a small portion of the state.

A study completed by CreditWise in December of 2020 stated that worries about finances came in as the number one cause of stress, with 73% of people rating it as their top cause of stress. According to Forbes, “High levels of financial stress, as with other stressors, can manifest itself through physical symptoms such as anxiety, headaches/migraines, compromised immune systems, digestive issues, high blood pressure, muscle tension, heart arrhythmia, depression, and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Individuals with high financial stress are twice as likely to report poor health overall and are four times more likely to complain of ailments.”

Building a healthy, thriving economy means raising the minimum wage with strong indexing, so workers can thrive. **With that, we urge a favorable report on HB 549, The Fair Wage Act of 2023.**