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Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 549
Chair C.T. Wilson
House Economic Matters Committee

Good Afternoon Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby and members of the Committee. I am writing on behalf of Maryland Rise today to **request a favorable report on HB 549 - Fair Wage Act of 2023**. Maryland workers deserve higher wages, and while the Minimum Wage Act of 2019 was a step in the right direction, workers continue to struggle to make ends meet. Inflation is on the rise, and even in one of the wealthiest states in the nation, families are struggling to meet basic human needs despite working full time. There is currently nowhere in the state that even a single adult with no children can afford a basic standard of living on less than \$15 per hour. This is an unacceptable state of affairs, and the Fair Wage Act will remedy this by accelerating the timeline set in the 2019 bill, and tying the state's minimum wage to the consumer price index.

Since the legislature passed the Minimum Wage Act in 2019, Marylanders have weathered a pandemic. Frontline workers, many of whom were directly affected by the minimum wage law, worked tirelessly to keep our essential businesses and services running, and showed just how valuable their work is. Unfortunately, **the wage increases implemented by the 2019 law have not kept up with inflation**, meaning that those workers who we relied on so heavily are in some cases no better off than they were before.

To fix this, The Fair Wage Act of 2023 will make two changes to the current law that will have tremendous benefits to Maryland workers and the economy. First, the bill will accelerate the timeline so that all affected workers will be making \$15 by the end of this year. This will partially make up for the rising cost of living we have seen since the pandemic. To ensure workers do not fall behind again, the bill will also tie the minimum wage to the consumer price index. This way, wages will keep pace with cost of living, so that workers will at minimum be able to afford the necessities. Without indexing, workers earning the state's basement wage will continue to see the value of their work erode as costs rise. Indexing the minimum wage **will help employers, who will have more predictable labor costs**. For these reasons Maryland Rise requests a favorable report on HB 549.