



Testimony on HB549/SB555
Fair Wage Act of 2023
Position: **FAVORABLE**

To Chair Wilson & Members of the House Economic Matters Committee;
To Chair Griffith & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the country, with over 10,000 members in Maryland and Washington DC. Our union is a founding member of the Fight for \$15 Maryland coalition. We urge a favorable report on the Fair Wage Act of 2023 with no weakening amendments. This bill will put hard earned cash in the pocket of working Marylanders and will especially benefit the essential workers who kept us afloat during COVID19.

There is a short staffing crisis across the healthcare industry in Maryland. One of the major contributing factors to short staffing in healthcare facilities is low wages. We have seen healthcare workers bearing the burden of COVID19 choose to leave healthcare all together because they could make comparable wages in other industries with less risk to their health and safety. Short staffing negatively impacts healthcare workers physical and mental health, and patients suffer when they are not able to see a healthcare provider in a timely manner due to short staffing. The Fair Wage Act of 2023 will raise wages for union and non-union healthcare workers alike, which will help to recruit and retain healthcare workers across our state.

The Fair Wage Act of 2023 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.

Healthcare workers and low-wage essential workers are overworked and underpaid. The time to raise their wages is NOW. Please vote YES on this bill.

In Unity,

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