



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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**HB 965 – Labor and Employment – Minimum Wage – Allegany County and Garrett County
House Economic Matters Committee
March 10, 2020**

OPPOSE

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 965 – Labor and Employment – Minimum Wage – Allegany County and Garrett County. My name is Donna S. Edwards and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments in strong opposition to HB 965.

HB 965 is an attack on workers in Allegany and Garrett counties. There is absolutely no good reason to pay them less for the same amount of labor they provide as a worker in Baltimore City, Anne Arundel, Kent, , Prince George’s, or any other county. Our minimum wage should never be based on where you live or work. We should not be in the business of telling workers that their labor is worth less because they live in a rural area.

I have lived in Baltimore for over 40 years but spent most weekends traveling back to Cumberland where I grew up and now maintain a second home where I spend a lot of time. I have deep roots – both family and friends – in Mountain Maryland. This weekend, I filled up my gas tank in Cumberland for the drive back to Annapolis and paid \$2.89/gallon. As I drove across our State, I watched as the signs of gas prices at roadside stations dropped along the way. By the time I arrived in Central Maryland, gas was averaging \$2.26/gallon.

It’s not “cheaper” to live in Western Maryland. Living costs are just shifted from one area to another. Both my neighborhoods in Baltimore City and Cumberland have houses that sold at \$275,000 and houses you can buy at \$75,000. Unlike urban areas, there is no reliable public transportation. If you want to work, you must drive. Gas is not the only added expense. People still have student debt, medical debt, and grocery costs and clothing are not cheaper because you live in a rural area.

Workers in Allegany and Garrett are struggling to get by. Because hourly wages are considerably lower in rural than urban areas, the minimum wage comprises a larger share of average wages in the region. Also, far more adults are working at minimum wages, as are women head of households and older workers in the rural areas.

HB 965 undermines them, and it undermines the economy in the counties. With increased salaries comes increased spending, which, in turn, goes back into the local economy and local businesses.

We ask for an unfavorable report on HB 965.