



Testimony on HB698  
Labor and Employment – State Minimum Wage Rate – Increase  
Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair C.T. Wilson & Members of the House Economic Matters Committee,

My name is Ricarra Jones. I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, the largest healthcare workers union in the nation. There are ten thousand 1199SEIU members working in hospitals and Long-Term Care Facilities in Maryland and Washington DC alone. Our union helped lead the Fight for \$15, and we continue to support any legislation that will raise wages for workers, especially essential workers like our members. We ask the Committee to issue a **favorable** report on HB698 to speed up the timeline for wage increases to \$15/hour that are already in Maryland law, and remove the problematic “off ramp” that allows the Board of Public Works to halt much needed wage increases. There is nowhere in the State of Maryland where a worker can afford the cost of basic necessities while earning under \$15/hour. This was true when the Fight for \$15 legislation passed in 2019, and is even more true in 2022 as the cost of living is much higher than it was in 2019.

Healthcare workers are in a dual crisis, battling both the health risks of COVID19 and the consequences of short staffing. In most cases, health care workers are supposed to care for ~7 patients per shift. Now, many workers are caring for 17 patients per shift. One 1199 member shared her experience working short staffed, saying: “When we are short staffed, treating patients becomes like working on an assembly line, so we are not able to give the high-quality care our patients deserve.” Another worker shared concerns about the impact on healthcare workers who may lose their jobs because of short staffing. He said “If we make a mistake because we don’t have enough time with our patients or because we are too tired from being overworked, we are at risk of losing our medical licenses. It is unfair for management to keep us

short staffed, then punish us when mistakes are made that would not have been made if there was proper staffing in the facility.”

Low wages are one of the most cited reasons as to why healthcare workers are quitting in droves. I heard a story from an 1199 member last week about how she was showing a new hire around the facility where she works, and when she showed the new hire the pay she’d be earning, the new hire said “I’m going to the restroom, and I’ll be right back.” Quite a bit of time went by, and the 1199 member looked out the window at the parking lot just in time to see the new hire get in her car, drive away, and never return to the facility. If we want to fight against short staffing in health care, increasing wages is the first and most important step in the right direction.

Not only healthcare workers, but all essential workers showed up to work on the front lines of COVID19 every day, often putting themselves and their families at risk, while earning poverty wages of under \$15/hour. Speeding up the timeline for minimum wage increases in Maryland is necessary for true economic recovery from the financial crisis caused by COVID19. Low wage, essential workers were most adversely impacted by the economic consequences of the pandemic – and therefore any plans for economic recovery must uplift Maryland’s lowest paid workers by increasing wages. Wage increases will not only benefit working families, it will also pour billions of dollars into Maryland’s economy.

Throughout the pandemic, we have heard over and over again that essential workers are “heroes,” and that is true! But even though they are heroes, essential workers are still being paid as if they were “zeros.” I urge the committee to vote **yes on HB698**. Thank you.

Respectfully,

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