



March 26, 2024

Dear members of the House Economic Matters Committee,

My name is Kelsey Bacon and I've been a worker-owner at Common Ground Cafe Cooperative, a coffee shop in Baltimore's Hampden neighborhood since we opened on September 18, 2023.

Our cooperative was born out of necessity. Just two months prior on July 2, I found myself suddenly unemployed as our boss shut down our workplace with less than 12 hours notice. Despite having generated record sales over the summer, we were given no explanation as to why 30 of us were now forced to scramble for our livelihoods. The closure also shocked the community, who had embraced Common Ground as a local favorite and essential third space in the neighborhood for the past 25 years.

Our old boss, the owner of about 7 years, was rarely present. I had seen him maybe 3 times in the year that I had been working there. Any ideas we had for the business would have to be filtered through management, where ideas were eagerly received and immediately shut down. Frustrated with this lack of transparency, lack of control, low wages, and other workplace issues, we had already been in the process of unionizing.

In conversations during the union campaign, I noticed that those who were most hesitant about forming a union were vocal in their support of forming a co-op. They liked the idea of the control that we would have as owners, rather than constantly fighting with a boss who didn't care about the business, just the bottom line. However, we had no idea how this could be done. The complexity of the process made it feel out of reach.

After this crisis and through our organization efforts, community support, and the support of Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy (BRED), we were able to re-open as a worker-owned cooperative. It has been incredibly rewarding to experience collective ownership, where we have created an environment of democratic decision-making and have worked to combat the exploitation that is rife in the food service industry.

I ask that you return a favorable report on SB0085, already voted favorably unanimously in the senate, to support worker-ownership in Maryland and help more workers take control of their labor.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kelsey Bacon