

SB160_LouiseWeissman_FAV
Date of Hearing: February 1, 2024
Louise M. Weissman
District 22, Greenbelt, MD 20770

TESTIMONY ON SB#160/HB#467 - POSITION: (FAVORABLE)
Labor and Employment - Payment of Minimum Wage - Tipped Employees

TO: Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Louise M. Weissman

My name is Louise Weissman. I am a resident of District 22 and live in Greenbelt. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#160/HB#467 - Labor and Employment - Payment of Minimum Wage - Tipped Employees.

I am a retiree. I have lived in Prince George's County for over 30 years, but I grew up in Boston, MA. My family was in the restaurant business. The restaurant was in a working class neighborhood. Customers were local shop owners and workers as well as families who lived close by. The employees, including waitresses, have always made a modest living. But as of 1966, servers have been penalized through the Sub-minimum Wage Tipped Worker regulations in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

My father and my uncle (mother's brother) were co-owners. My mother was the bookkeeper. My aunt and her mother came in periodically when a cashier was sick. My cousin, my sister and I worked as cashiers starting at 14, eventually working as waitresses. I worked Saturdays and holidays during the school year and 5 days a week during the summer. My wages and tips were deposited into a college savings account. Below Minimum Wage for Tipped Workers was instituted in 1966 when I started working, but the cost of living and college costs were also significantly lower. With help from my parents, the savings helped foot my college expenses, along with work study and loans. But attending college was financially easier to achieve then. When I went to UMass/Amherst, tuition for a semester was \$200. When I graduated, my loans were well below \$10,000, not 10's or 100's of thousand dollars as students face now. **TIMES HAVE CHANGED!**

The FLSA was established in 1966 with a bare minimum floor for tipped wages only. I don't recall any initiatives to fight for parity after that. But the economy and cost of living now are not what they were then. The federal tipped minimum wage has remained at \$2.13/hour since 1991, though in Maryland the tipped minimum wage is \$3.63. Failing to raise the tipped minimum wage is harmful for all restaurant servers, but it disproportionately hurts people of color and women.

I want to make one other point. After graduation, I worked in non-profit organizations, many national, managing operations and administration, including event management. The events were often large-scale held in hotels with conference facilities. The events were sometimes more than one day, and on the last day, you could find me preparing and handing out tip

envelopes to employees, including set-up crews, banquet servers and captains, A/V managers, as well as conference service and reservation managers. These tips were gratuities only for a job well done, not income to be credited against the employees' wages.

I come from a family that believed all work should be treated with dignity and respect. I am convinced if he were alive today my father would agree that it's time for the bare-minimum wage for tipped workers to be eliminated in Maryland as well as across the country. Industry employees, predominantly people of color and women, all struggle to make ends meet whether full- or part-time. There is no parity for servers in restaurants with other tipped employees in the hospitality industry who are not subject to the same penalty. There is no proof that restaurants will close because people will stop eating out if this bill passes. There's no proof that customers will stop tipping servers. Rather, let's ensure a living wage for servers and tips that are a true acknowledgement of appreciation for excellent service. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#160.**