



Testimony for SB 0085

My name is Molly Farwell G. Baker, and I am writing to submit favorable testimony for SB 0085 on behalf of Metta Integrative Wellness Cooperative.

I am a founding co-owner at **Metta Integrative Wellness Cooperative** in the Hampden neighborhood of Baltimore. **We currently employ 10 massage and bodywork professionals.** Our business **opened in 2021 as a cooperative conversion** from an existing LLC that had been in operation since 2007. The business had earned a well-established and positive reputation in the neighborhood and larger Baltimore community as a center for healing arts.

After mandated closure in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LLC business owner wanted to cease operations. The conversion to cooperative ownership gave myself and the other independent contractors an opportunity to carry on the business' legacy and our livelihoods with an even deeper investment in our community. **If not for this opportunity, the business closure would have meant that most of us had to find jobs with fewer perks, lower pay, and longer commutes.**

In the conversion, not only were we able to keep the jobs we had collectively worked at for over 50 years, but **we were able to structure our Co-op to improve our employment situation in the following ways:**

1. Converted from 1099 contractors to W2 employees, thereby:
 - a. Securing eligibility for unemployment¹ and workers comp benefits
 - b. Saving approximately 15% of our gross wage on self-employment tax;
2. Increased hourly pay by an average of \$3.50
3. Prioritized additional employment benefits, including:
 - a. cell phone reimbursement
 - b. employee & family discounts
 - c. expense reimbursement
 - d. disability income insurance &
 - e. paid time off
4. Increased employee interest, investment, and influence in the business
5. Reduced our environmental impact by collectively making decisions to change our operations and reduce waste

¹ During the mandated closures of 2020, many professional massage therapists were unable to access government support due to working as Independent Contractors and/or having multiple jobs with different employment types.

METTA INTEGRATIVE WELLNESS COOPERATIVE CORPORATION

HAMPDEN, BALTIMORE, MD



WWW.METTA-WELLNESS.COM

One of the biggest barriers we faced in formation of our Co-op was a lack of general knowledge and resources to support cooperative business owners. It was a challenge to educate and align ourselves towards this goal, because individual colleagues knew so little about what a cooperative business could look like. Once we had aligned our own interests and vision, it was a challenge to find professional advisors, accountants, and attorneys with the expertise to advise us on our next steps. We are incredibly grateful for the support we received from BRED, an independent organization that works towards this mission. We are in favor of SB 0085 because it would raise general awareness of worker-cooperative businesses and codify processes that other professionals could learn about to support these local businesses. We believe that SB 0085 will help more individuals and communities benefit from more equitable business practices and bolster local economies and worker security.

Thank you for your time and for receiving my testimony on behalf of our business.

Sincerely,

Molly Farwell G. Baker

Co-owner, Treasurer at Metta Integrative Wellness Cooperative

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