

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 123:
Labor and Employment - Wage History and Wage Range

TO: Hon. Dereck Davis, Chair, and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee
FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate
DATE: February 4, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates for better jobs, skills training, and wages for low-income workers and job seekers in Maryland. We strongly support House Bill 123 as a means of ensuring that Maryland's workers are properly paid and have access to higher wages.

The "wage gap" is used to describe the difference in pay between the genders and racial background. Since 1980, the gap has decreased dramatically, but today, nearly twenty years later, women and people of color are still being paid less for doing the same job. In fact, progress on this issue has been stagnant since 2000. In 2016, Pew Research Center reported that, despite progress, women still earned only 83 percent of the hourly wages that men earned. In addition, people of color earned an even lesser percentage.

In Maryland, while the data shows a percentage better than the national average, women still receive 84 cents for every dollar that a man makes. According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, Black women are paid 69 cents, Latinas are paid 47 cents and Asian women are paid 83 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Even further, of the 304,000 family households headed by women in the state, about 19 percent of those families fall below the poverty level.

Various employment barriers contribute to the wage gap, such as disparities in the criminal justice system, societal gender roles, and occupation type. However, despite the additional aggravating factors, studies have shown that women, people of color, and those of lower income are perpetually paid less across industry sectors. Even further, according to an American Association of Women study, the wage gap starts at college graduation, even for those who are in the same academic program. In addition, private and public employers utilize practices that further the wage gap, such as asking for wage history or withholding pay scale information from particular candidates.

House Bill 123 seeks to address this issue. If enacted, this bill would prohibit an employer from questioning an individual about their wage history and would require employers to provide a pay scale for a position when requested. This type of transparency in pay scale and limits of wage history aim to

break the cycle of the wage gap. This means that an individual who historically be paid less will not continue to demand such low pay, simply because of their poor wage history. As such, this practice also aims to break the cycle of poverty among communities of color, which often consist of households led by women of color – the lowest paid working group, according to state data.

The proposed legislation would ensure that discrimination in wages is a part of Maryland's past, not its future. Additionally, it would afford many of the state's most vulnerable working families the same protections and *quality of life* as others. JOTF is all too familiar with the far-reaching consequences of the wage gap on low-income families, toiling to make ends meet. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report of House Bill 123.