



Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1097:

Maryland Wage and Hour Law and Maryland Wage Payment and Collection Law – Revisions (Maryland Wage Protection Act)

TO: Hon. Dereck E. Davis, Chair, and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: March 3rd, 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 support the Maryland Wage Protection Act as a means of ensuring lower-income workers have honest access to their earned wages.

Wage theft – the denial of minimum wage, overtime, and other promised wages – deprives low-wage workers of an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work, with Black and Latinx suffering a disproportionate share of the harm. One study found that 32.8% of Latinx employees in low-wage industries had experienced minimum wage violations, while 77.6% had experienced overtime violations. Immigrant Latinx workers, both documented and undocumented, are particularly hard hit – 35.1% have suffered minimum wage violations, and have suffered unlawful denials of overtime pay. Black workers, meanwhile, are three times as likely as their white counterparts to suffer minimum wage violations. Indeed, wage theft is one of the factors that contributes to the racial wage gap that has been growing throughout the country in recent years.

The Maryland Wage Protection Act ensures that Black and Latinx workers – and all workers – receive their hard-earned wages by strengthening Maryland law to combat the most common practices that employers use to commit wage theft:

- **Retaliation Protections:** Employees afraid of retaliation – termination, reduced hours, pay cuts, or for immigrant workers, calls to immigration authorities – often stay silent about wage theft, even when it means going without needed pay. Under current law, district attorneys can theoretically pursue misdemeanor charges against an employer who retaliates against an employee for seeking wages, but such enforcement actions are extremely rare and employees themselves can do nothing to protect themselves from retaliation. The Maryland Wage Protection Act empowers workers to take legal action against retaliation they have suffered, so that they can recover their earned wages.
- **Paystub Transparency:** Employers can mask wage violations with paystubs that have vague or misleading information. An employee who receives a paystub that states only a lump sum or does not list

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regular or overtime hours has no way of knowing if he or she has been paid correctly. The Maryland Wage Protection Act requires employers to print basic information that they are already required to track – about wage rates, hours, and deductions – on employee pay stubs so that employees know that they are receiving all that they have earned.

- **Prohibition on Misclassification:** True independent contractors are people who are in business for themselves – with broad authority to set their own rates and hours – and who therefore are not covered by the wage laws. Employers misclassify employees as independent contractors as one way to skirt minimum wage and overtime requirements. The Maryland Wage Protection Act clarifies the definition of “independent contractor” to prevent employers from inappropriately applying that label to workers who are under their control and not truly operating their own businesses.

JOTF supports the Maryland Wage Protection Act, which combats wage theft, a practice that disproportionately deprives Black and Latinx workers of full and fair compensation for their labor. For these reasons, JOTF strongly supports House Bill 1097 and urges a favorable report.