

February 6, 2020

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Tracy Lingo, Staff Director, UNITE HERE Local 7

RE: SENATE BILL 0062 – Labor and Employment - Secure Maryland Wage Act

POSITION: SUPPORT

Good afternoon, my name is Tracy Lingo. I am the Staff Director of UNITE HERE Local 7. UNITE HERE represents thousands of airport catering workers, servers, bartenders cooks, baristas and cashier in US airports. There are approximately 1,100 of these food and retail workers at Thurgood Marshall BWI airport. 300 of them are represent by our Union. They work at HMS Host, Hudson News and LSG Sky Chefs. Inside of Marshall of Airport the food and retail operations are under the umbrella of Fraport. This is known as the developer model of providing service to travelers. At Thurgood Marshall BWI this Developer Model creates a race to the bottom that rewards concessionaries that pay the lowest wages and benefits.

The majority of the BWI retail, food and beverage workers are African American and immigrants. They live primarily in Baltimore City and Anne Arundel County and face long commutes on public transportation to jobs that pay low wages, wages at non-union food and retail outlets at BWI hover just above the minimum wage, and either do not offer affordable health insurance. These conditions create extremely stressful situations for workers who must try to balance food, housing, health care, childcare, and transportation costs on poverty level budgets. As a result of these low wages and high stress, we see extremely high levels of turn over. In 2018 alone we saw a 300% turnover in Starbucks baristas for example. This high level of stress and turnover is not only bad for workers but creates a safety concern. Our long-term airport members will tell you that workers who have years of experience with airport customers are able to identity and respond to situations that are suspicion or out of the ordinary much more quickly than new workers, trying to learn a fast paced job while worrying about the home life stresses that poverty level work creates.

This is in sharp contrast to the minimum wages that have been established for airport workers by the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority, the city of Philadelphia, the Port Authority of New Jersey and New York and other major metropolitan areas. It's time for Maryland to make jobs at ports of entry like our airport more secure by reducing the high turnover produced by low wage jobs.

As hospitality workers, we support HB 629/SB 794 as an essential way to create a level playing field that will bring all port of entry workers above the poverty line. Without meaningfully living wage legislation for these workers, the current developer model at Thurgood Marshall BWI airport will continue to create a race to the bottom that rewards concessionaries that pay the lowest wages and benefits. Creating a higher wage for port of entry workers, like the food, beverage and retail workers at Thurgood Marshall BWI airport will reduce turn over and the stresses associated with poverty level work.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on this important issue.