

Testimony of Chartel Scott

Before the Senate Finance Committee

In Support of SB 780, the Maryland Economic Stabilization Act-Revision

February 27, 2020

Chairwoman Kelly, Vice Chairman Feldman, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 780, the Maryland Economic Stabilization Act.

My name is Chartel Scott. I've worked for Shoppers Food & Pharmacy for 27 years.

In October 2018, my world was turned upside down. A Rhode Island company named UNFI bought the Shoppers chain only to announce it was going to sell or close it down. From that point on, we were left hanging, hearing nothing about what our fates would be.

Just over one year later, shortly before Christmas, UNFI suddenly announced it was closing four stores and selling 13 others. My daughter, who worked at the Shoppers in Waldorf, lost her job within days. My own store in Oxon Hill was also closed and my job was soon gone.

Despite this, I consider myself lucky, because my union, UFCW Local 400, bargained a severance agreement with UNFI. That gave me the right to transfer to another store and I now work at Shoppers in Clinton. Though that store's fate, like all the remaining Shoppers, is up in the air. So I'm still working and living in limbo.

What happened to my daughter and I — and thousands of my Local 400 sisters and brothers — illustrates exactly why we need you to pass SB 780.

We weren't given the 60 days notice required under federal law because of a loophole applying to stores with fewer than 50 full-time employees. And UNFI ignored Maryland's voluntary guidelines because it is driven by greed and has no sense of social responsibility.

The Maryland Economic Stabilization Act will fix these problems. It sets requirements, not guidelines. It gets rid of the federal loophole by applying the law to all businesses with more than 50 employees statewide — not per store or facility. It mandates 90 days notice for closures or staff reductions, which is the least we should be able to expect. And it requires severance pay of one week per year worked.

Throughout all of my 27 years at Shoppers, I've shown up and put in an honest day's work no matter what. When I was tired and aching, I showed up and took care of my store.

When there was snow and ice on the ground, I showed up and took care of my store. When I was anxious and worried that my job was about to be taken away from me, I showed up and took care of my store. No matter what, I worked hard and made the company a success. And in exchange, what did I get? A slap in the face — one week before Christmas.

We deserve better. We deserve respect. That's what SB 780 will provide. Please pass this urgently needed bill as soon as possible. Thank you.