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SB 862: Labor & Employment - Minimum Wage - Allegany County and Garrett County

Hearing before the Finance Committee, March 12, 2020

Position: OPPOSE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Workplace Justice Project works to expand and enforce the right of low-wage workers to an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. The PJC opposes SB 862, which would further delay Maryland's already gradual implementation of a \$15 minimum wage in Allegany and Garrett Counties.

Last year's minimum wage bill was amended to increase the minimum wage slower than originally proposed—and even slower for small businesses—which more than addresses the concerns underlying SB 862. As originally drafted, the bill would have required that all employers pay a minimum wage of \$15 per hour by 2023, and would have then pegged the minimum wage to account for inflation. The bill that ultimately passed included amendments to address the concerns of small businesses and rural employers in two big ways. First, the bill significantly slowed the minimum wage increase so that Maryland's minimum wage would not reach \$15 until 2025. Second, the bill slowed it even more for businesses with fewer than 15 employees; these employers are not required to pay a \$15 minimum wage until 2026.

All Marylanders—including those who work for low wages in rural areas, and cannot afford to give up a day's wages to testify in Annapolis—deserve to work for wages that do not trap them in poverty. Last year, the General Assembly rejected proposed amendments that would have established a tiered geographic system for different regions in the state because *all* Marylanders deserve to work for wages that do not trap them in poverty. Counties with a higher cost of living may increase their minimum wage beyond what state law requires, but no one in Maryland—including Marylanders who work for minimum wages in Allegany and Garrett Counties—can afford to live on less than Maryland's existing minimum wage. *Low-wage workers in Western Maryland cannot afford to come to Annapolis and testify about their struggles to get by, but they are real.* Traveling to Annapolis from Western Maryland means giving up a day's pay. The vast majority of minimum-wage earners cannot afford to do that. These workers are depending on the minimum wage increase that the General Assembly passed last year.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **OPPOSES SB 862** and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report. Should you have any questions, please call David Rodwin at 410-625-9409 ext. 249.