



House Economic Matters Committee

HB0685 – Labor and Employment - Secure Maryland Wage Act

Testimony of Jaime Contreras, Vice President and Director, Capital Area District, 32BJ SEIU

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Good afternoon Committee Chair Davis, Vice-Chair Dumais and Committee Members. My name is Jaime Contreras, Vice President of SEIU 32BJ. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on behalf of the union’s 20,000 members in Maryland and the D.C. Metro area.

This bill will help to make the state safer by working to ensure that experienced employees are employed at heightened security interest locations, all while making a transformational difference in the lives of hard working men and women.

At the same time, it will protect the traveling public and essential workers by providing for health benefits for essential frontline workers. The majority of service workers at these facilities are Black and Brown and at higher risk for the disease and often don’t have access to affordable healthcare.

Given the Port of Baltimore is a major shipping terminal, workers are the eyes and ears against the constant threat of illegal activity.

Research has shown that higher wages correlate to reduced employee turnover. In security and safety roles this is shown to have a measurable impact on security outcomes. Similar policies to that proposed here are in place at LAX, Oakland Airport, the Port of Oakland, and the three New York City airports, as well as Dulles and Reagan National.

Setting a minimum wage and benefit rates based on the prevailing area standards for security guards will not mean luxury for workers. These rates are by definition the industry standard but importantly they may mean access to meaningful health insurance outside of public programs for the first time. Setting a wage standard also eliminated the “race-to-the bottom” that we often see happen to employees of service contractors engaged in competitive bidding. Contracting work isn’t a problem – it’s only a concern when it is done without safeguards for workers. Enacting a wage requirement at these transportation facilities would mean that contractors would compete on the basis of their ability to manage the work and their expertise in their industry, not on who can cut wages and benefits the most.

Restoring public confidence is crucial to getting transportation hubs – key drivers of our state’s economy- back to full capacity. Easing access to health insurance will go a long way to meeting that goal.

I urge you to support this bill, and help make Maryland healthier and safer while improving the lives of thousands of workers.