

Good afternoon, my name is Arnita Washington , I'm from Baltimore City and a member of 32BJ SEIU.

I've been working as a security officer at the Port of Baltimore for more than 10 years. Security professionals at the Port of Baltimore are on the front line at a site that is very important to the State of Maryland. Now, during the COVID crisis, it is even harder. We work in a remote location, public transportation can be difficult, many of us risk our lives and the lives of our loved ones just getting to work. When you get paid lower wages with few benefits, it can be hard to do the job you want to do.

For our coworkers with children, the stress over worrying about bills and childcare on these wages can be distracting. In my experience, the lower wages mean that more people will call out often. When that happens, guards like me who are on duty at the time have to stay over. That can leave us sleep deprived which makes it much harder to focus and harder to catch everything the way I want to, that may come in or look out of place. To make it worse, after more than a decade of work at the Port, my vacation is limited to one week per year. It's exhausting. We need rest!

However, if you pay well enough, people will be willing to stay – we have to make sure everyone has the resources to come to work. Those at the Port who don't have insurance through their spouses or who can't afford our employer's insurance may get it through the state exchange...which the state pays for anyways. They rob Peter to pay Paul. That doesn't make sense. When you protect your home, you don't get the cheapest alarm system out there –you want the best.

You need to hire and pay those who are protecting our ports a wage that matches the seriousness of our job.

Most of the guards at the Port of Baltimore are African American and need to support their families, especially during the crisis that we are experiencing. The Port is a still a very big business for the State, yet we are not compensated in a manner that reflects the importance of our work.

Please do the right thing and pass the Secure Maryland Wage Act. Thank you.