

**Labor and Employment - Maryland Wage and Hour Law - Agricultural Stands, Retail
Farms, and Farmers' Markets**

Bill Sponsor: Senator Carozza

Committee: Finance

Organization Submitting: Lower Shore Progressive Caucus

Person Submitting: Jared Schablein, LSPC Chair

Position: UNFAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in opposition to SB0502 on behalf of the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus. The Caucus is a political and activist organization on the Eastern Shore, unaffiliated with any political party, committed to empowering working people by building a Progressive movement on the Lower Eastern Shore.

A large segment of the membership of the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus work in the many different types of agricultural jobs that are on the Lower Eastern Shore. These workers are the lifeblood of the Eastern Shore economy and to have members of this body put forth legislation saying they deserve to make less than the rest of the state despite how difficult and vital their jobs are for the well-being of our region and state is nothing short of an insult. To make matters worse not a single legislator who has sponsored this bill has advocated for reducing their own salaries. These legislators expect to receive equal pay as legislators from other parts of the state and then turn around and demand rural workers work on reduced salaries.

The second reason we strongly oppose this bill is because farmworkers are essential workers. Since the start of the global pandemic there has been a major emphasis on highlighting the work and sacrifices of our essentials workers who keep things running at great risk to themselves and their families. Without the sacrifices of agricultural workers here on the Lower Eastern Shore

and across Rural Maryland we wouldn't have been able to keep our stores stocked and our society going during the pandemic. Also, these agricultural workers are often put in the most dangerous conditions and at the biggest risk of being exposed to Covid-19. There would be no cruel punishment than for this body to support legislation to reduce their pay after all the hardships they have endured and the work they do to keep our society functioning.

The third reason we strongly oppose this bill is because our workers need and deserve a livable wage. For decades, there has been a myth pushed that it is far cheaper to live in rural areas like the Lower Shore compared to more urban areas and that we can be paid several dollars less for our labor and still be able to survive. This has been proved false by a study conducted by Maryland Center on Economic Policy. Their study found that workers on the Lower Shore need to make between \$15.51 to \$18.56 an hour to be able to afford to live here. The study also found that the Lower Eastern Shore would be the biggest benefactor of raising the wage and lift many of our residents out of poverty. Eastern Shore workers are not inferior to other workers in Maryland and we can not afford to be excluded from the minimum wage increase.

For these reasons, the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus urges legislators to stand with Eastern Shore workers by opposing this bill and giving it an **UNFAVORABLE** report in committee.