
BILL NO: House Bill 698
TITLE: Labor and Employment - State Minimum Wage Rate – Increase
COMMITTEE: Economic Matters
HEARING DATE: February 22, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

Building on 2019 legislation that raised the statewide minimum wage rate to \$15.00/hour by the year 2025, House Bill 698 will accelerate the timeline and will remove the provision in current minimum wage law that allows the Board of Public Works to suspend wage increases.

During the pandemic, women have been disproportionately forced out of the job market at unprecedented rates. This so-called she-cession has resulted in women, who are overrepresented in many of the sectors that have been hardest hit such as hospitality, leisure, restaurants, and education, accounting for as much as 83% of the jobs lost in those sectors. It has been even more devastating for Black and Latina women, who make up a disproportionate percentage of workers in those sectors and who, not surprisingly, have experienced unemployment levels at an even higher rate than their white counterparts. This mass exodus can be strongly attributed a combination of lack of paid family leave and stagnant wages that are insufficient to care for a family, or cover child care costs necessary in order to work.

Women account for less than half of the U.S. working population, yet nearly 6 in 10 workers earning the minimum wage are women¹. Many are working full time and yet they are still living below the poverty line². In Maryland, two-thirds of families now have women as sole, co, or primary breadwinners. Women of Color constitute 23% of minimum wage workers, yet only 16% of the general workforce³. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues and brought Maryland families to a breaking point. At the same time, half of the workers who will benefit from this raise are women and people of color, helping to narrow the gender and racial pay gap. Marylanders need progressive minimum wage laws that accurately reflect the growth and demands of our communities.

The pandemic has decimated working families who cannot afford to wait until 2025 for their wages to keep up with the economy. Therefore, the Women's Law Center of Maryland supports House Bill 698.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.

¹ Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/05/more-women-than-men-earn-the-federal-minimum-wage/>

² U.S. Department of Labor, <https://blog.dol.gov/2015/03/19/facts-about-women-and-the-minimum-wage>

³ National Women's Law Center, <http://nwlc.org/resources/fair-pay-women-requires-fair-minimum-wage/>