



**TESTIMONY ON SB 721 - “Labor and Employment - State Minimum Wage Rate – Acceleration”**

**TO:** Hon. Delores Kelley, Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee

**FROM:** Gina Schaefer, Owner, A Few Cool Hardware Stores

**DATE:** March 10, 2022

**POSITION:** SUPPORT

My name is Gina Schaefer, owner of A Few Cool Hardware Stores. Since opening our first store in 2003, A Few Cool Hardware Stores has grown to a company of 13 stores in Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Virginia. We have three stores in Baltimore, including Canton Ace Hardware, Federal Hill Ace Hardware and Waverly Ace Hardware & Garden Center, as well two stores in Montgomery County, Old Takoma Ace Hardware and Silver Spring Ace Hardware.

We strongly supported raising Maryland’s minimum wage to \$15. Given the rising cost of living in Maryland, affecting low-income workers and communities particularly hard, we support Senate Bill 721 to speed up implementation of the \$15 minimum wage that was passed in 2019.

We couldn’t have grown to 13 hardware stores without our dedicated employees and the customers they serve every day. We know from experience that raising pay at the bottom is good for the bottom line.

Our employee retention rates are higher than the industry average. That saves us time and money in hiring and training new employees due to needless turnover rather than intentional workforce expansion. Paying fair wages helps us attract and retain good employees, increase sales, expand our business, and hire more employees.

When employees earn a decent starting wage, they can concentrate on their job and our customers without continual stress over how they are going to afford basics like rent, groceries or transportation. They can focus on delivering great customer service, which is vital for local businesses like ours. We never forget our customers have a choice – and they choose us!

Fair pay has always been key to the great service that keeps our customers coming back. And paying better wages and benefits has been key to our ability to retain and hire staff throughout the pandemic. We filled over 120 positions last year in Maryland and our other locations, when many other retailers had difficulty with hiring and retention.

Our employees have shown tremendous dedication throughout the pandemic. They are the people responsible for upholding our reputation and interacting with our customers in good times and in bad. Satisfied customers don’t just keep coming back themselves, they tell their friends and families about us.

A few cool   
**Hardware Stores**

Raising the state minimum wage is an excellent way to boost the economy. Minimum wage increases don't go into workers' pockets and disappear. The money recirculates as spending at local businesses like ours. Whole communities are strengthened.

Improving Maryland's minimum wage will help businesses hire and retain workers, building more sustainable businesses for the long-term. It will make it more possible for all our communities to thrive.

I urge a favorable report on SB 721. Thank you.

Gina Schaefer  
Owner  
A Few Cool Hardware Stores  
1022 Binney St.  
Baltimore, MD 21224  
Gina@acehardwaredc.com  
(410) 327-0404