

Testimony in Support of HB0017
Employment Standards - Retail Establishments - Seating for Employees
February 3, 2023

To: The Honorable C.T. Wilson, Chair, and members of the House Economic Matters Committee

From: Kayla Mock, Political & Legislative Director
United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 400

Dear Chair Wilson and members of the Economic Matters Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony on behalf of our over 10,000 members in Maryland, who have worked the frontlines and have been essential employees in grocery, retail, food distribution, law enforcement, and health care. Through collective bargaining, our members have raised the workplace standards of wages, benefits, safety, and retirement for all workers.

We strongly support HB 17 and urge you to vote it favorably.

Jobs that require standing for prolonged periods of time are strenuous on the body overall. An article published by the U.S. National Library of Medicine summarizes over 17 studies that concluded, "prolonged standing at work has been shown to be associated with a number of potentially serious health outcomes, such as lower back pain, cardiovascular problems, fatigue, discomfort, and pregnancy related health outcomes." It is expected of employees to greet and serve customers with a smile; they should be granted the same courtesy to care for their bodies by sitting, if applicable, while they work.

Employees are often denied the ability to sit down while at work, simply because the employer prefers them to stand. Culturally, companies across Europe allow employees to sit while at work. In 2011, we took a group of Giant Food employees to the Netherlands to visit sister grocery stores owned by their parent company, Ahold. Upon entering the store, we all expressed gratification when we saw the cashiers sitting down while at work. The manager, who was giving us a tour, was taken aback by our excitement. When we explained that cashiers at Giant in the United States were not allowed to sit down while at work, the store manager exclaimed, "That's inhumane!"

Justice Carol A. Corrigan wrote an opinion on a class action lawsuit by CVS cashiers and JP Morgan Chase bank tellers in California which stated, "There is no principled reason for denying an employee a seat when he spends a substantial part of his workday at a single location, performing tasks that could reasonably be done while seated, merely because his job duties include other tasks that must be done while standing."

Workers are faced daily with challenging obstacles such as – agitated customers, extensive hours, and monotonous work. Essential workers are the people who carried us through the pandemic, and kept our economy functioning efficiently, as well as kept our society fed, cared for, and safe during a vulnerable and dangerous time. They deserve the right to sit down while at work.

On behalf of our members and the working people of Maryland, **we urge a favorable report for HB 17.**