

February 23, 2023

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 549
Chair C.T. Wilson
House Economic Matters Committee

Greetings Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby and members of the Committee. I am writing on behalf of Love AME Church today to request a favorable report on HB 549 - Fair Wage Act of 2023. Maryland workers deserve higher earnings, the Minimum Wage Act of 2019 was a step in the right path, but our workers remain struggling to pay for their necessities. Inflation is on the increase, and even here in one of the wealthiest states in our country, families are continuously grappling to meet essential human needs despite working full time. In the state of Maryland there is currently no zip code that even a single adult with no children can afford a basic standard of living on less than \$15 per hour. This is an intolerable situation, and the Fair Wage Act will remedy this by speeding up the timeline created in the 2019 bill and connect the state's minimum wage to the consumer price index.

Love AME Church is outreach focused and through partnerships we have fed thousands, clothed hundreds, and provided baby formula to countless babies all here in Maryland. Many of the people we serve work minimum wage jobs but remain struggling to make pay for basic needs. They need help and need it now! Since the legislature approved the Minimum Wage Act in 2019, Marylanders have endured a pandemic. Frontline workers were critical to our survival, many that were significantly affected by the minimum wage law, worked diligently to ensure our essential businesses and services kept running. They showed us all how vital their work is. Unfortunately, the wage increments put in place by the 2019 law have not kept pace with inflation, meaning that those workers who we relied on so heavily are in some cases still finding themselves struggling for basic needs. To remedy this, The Fair Wage Act of 2023 makes two changes to the current law that have enormous benefits to Maryland workers and the economy. First, the bill will speed up the timeline so that all affected workers will make \$15 by year end. This will partly make up for the increased cost of living we have witnessed since the pandemic. To ensure workers do not fall further behind again, the bill will also connect the minimum wage to the consumer price index. This way, wages will keep pace with cost of living, so that workers will at minimum be able to better afford their necessities. Without indexing, workers earning the state's bottom wage will continuously see the value of their work diminish as prices rise. Indexing the minimum wage will help employers, who will have more predictable labor costs. For these reasons Love AME Church requests a favorable report on HB 549.

Regards,



Reverend Krishnan Natesan
Founding Pastor