

House Economic Matters Committee

March 30, 2023

SB 555 – Fair Wage Act

Provided by Scott J. Whetsell, MD, MBA, FASAM

SUPPORT

MDDCSAM is the Maryland state chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine whose members are physicians and other health providers who treat people with substance use disorders.

Maryland’s Fair Wage Act of 2023 as amended in the Senate proposes to accelerate the planned increase the state’s minimum wage to \$15 per hour by January 1, 2024. MDDCSAM supports this legislation as it could attract and retain skilled workers, improve patient outcomes, reduce staff burnout, and lessen financial stress.

- **Attract and retain skilled workers:** The treatment of substance use disorders is labor intensive and requires skilled workers across a wide range of care. By increasing the minimum wage, treatment organizations can reduce high turnover rates by attracting and retaining skilled workers that will ensure patients receive quality care from more experienced professionals. In Maryland, on average, a peer support specialist makes \$15 per hour. These trained professionals with “lived experience” are crucial in providing support to those who struggle with substance use disorders and \$15 per hour should be the floor and not the mean.
- **Improve patient outcomes:** Paying skilled workers a fair wage can improve job satisfaction which may lead to better patient outcomes. Fairly compensated employees are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and invested in their work which can lead to better patient care and a more positive treatment experience.
- **Reduce staff burnout:** Substance use disorder treatment can be emotionally and physically demanding with workers often being exposed to stressful and traumatic situations. A fair wage can help reduce burnout leading to lower turnover rates, better continuity of care, and improved patient outcomes.
- **Less financial stress:** Financial stress can lead to or exacerbate mental health illness and drug addiction. Financial stress can also be a barrier to one receiving mental health or addiction treatment making an untenable situation even more consequential.

We ask for a favorable report.