

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
SB 555 – Fair Wage Act of 2023
March 2, 2023**

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Chair Griffith and members of the committee, AFT-Maryland is the state federation for public sector unions in Maryland including the Baltimore Teachers Union, the City Union of Baltimore, the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, the Baltimore County Federation of Public Health Nurses, the Maryland Professional Employees Council (state professional workers), and AFT-Healthcare Maryland (state public health workers). We call for a favorable report on SB 555, the Fair Wage Act of 2023.

While this bill may not directly benefit our members, they know first hand the negative impacts poverty-level wages have on the health and well-being of a community. Whether we see it in our classrooms with students living with food insecurity, city and county residents who are struggling to pay their water bills, or residents in desperate need of state health interventions, our members have direct experience working with the Marylanders this legislation would most directly benefit. Through our work, we in the union have realized this fundamental truth: the lifeblood of any healthy economy is its workforce, and studies prove time and again that a better-compensated workforce improves lives for the entire community.

We applaud the state's enactment of raising the minimum wage. Yet the task of really addressing this issue was again pushed aside, and since the enactment of that bill in 2019, inflation and the COVID-19 pandemic have stretched Marylanders dollars even further. No one has been harmed more by these economic troubles than the lowest wage earners in our state. Due to these downturns, the original plan of slowly ramping up to a new \$15 per hour minimum wage is no longer enough to meet basic living standards in our state.

This bill will fix the oversights of the past by accelerating the timeframe in which a \$15 per hour minimum wage will be the state standard, and it will adjust the minimum wage to keep up with inflation. Finally, indexing the minimum wage will help employers who will have more predictable labor costs. Again, for the overall health of our communities, we call for a favorable report on SB 555. Thank you.