

**BILL SB0555**

**HART for Animals, Inc., Paula Yudelevit, Executive Director**

**Unfavorable**

HART for Animals, Inc., located in rural Garrett County, urges you to reconsider or amend HB0549 “Fair Wage Act” which accelerates the minimum wage from \$15/hour in 2025 to \$15/hour on October 1, 2023. As a nonprofit with 40 employees, an increase of \$1.75 per employee amounts to \$9,000 in additional wages a month, or \$108,000 annually. Our net income in the entire year of 2022 was just \$8,000. Once enacted, this increase will result in fewer no/low-cost spay/neuters, higher prices for our underprivileged community, and layoffs of critical staff members. Therefore, HART is requesting an amendment that the state provide monetary relief until the year 2025 to those nonprofits with staff that do not receive state funding that will be unduly burdened by the accelerated timeline.

Our mission to improve the condition of animals in Western Maryland through rescue and transport, accessible spay/neuter surgeries, building and operating a humane animal center, and sheltering and adopting homeless animals is funded by private donations, fundraising, and small grants. Our veterinary clinic performs no and low-cost spay/neuters and emergency care for pets in our low-income households. Since 2009, our clinic has performed 13,072 low and no-cost spay/neuters for pets in our underserved community.

We are for the current legislation. Our current strategy is to gradually offset the costs of minimum wage increases based on the \$15/hour by 2025 legislation. Absorbing a \$9,000-a-month payroll increase (after the .75/hour increase in January) will not be sustainable without increasing our prices by 12%, affecting our low-income families. We already increased our prices in January to accommodate inflation and the minimum wage increase. This new increase will most likely lead to laying off staff who are critical to our mission.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of HART for Animals, we urge you to consider the negative impact on the public service we provide to the region.