



HB 188 - Unemployment Modernization Act of 2026
House Economic Matters Committee
February 11, 2026
SUPPORT
Tracy Lingo
President

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 188. UNITE HERE Local 7 represents about 3,000 hospitality workers throughout the state of Maryland. Our members work in hotels, casinos, University Food Service, Convention Centers, and stadiums. The industries our members work in are often seasonal and dependent on fluctuations in the tourism industry and as a result, many of our members need to use unemployment insurance for periods of each year when their hours are cut or they are laid off due to these fluctuations.

HB 188 recognizes that Maryland's existing benefit formula needs to reflect the true cost of living in Maryland. Currently, our hotel housekeepers and dishwashers make \$21.60 per hour. With a full week of work, they earn \$864 per week. Even at this wage, they are often living paycheck to paycheck to afford rent, groceries and utilities. Often in the winter, lower seniority housekeepers are laid off during weeks of low hotel occupancy. The maximum unemployment benefit of \$430 does not provide a sufficient safety net for workers who often face periods of unemployment. The proposed formula gradually increases the maximum benefit over time and ensures that UI payments reflect real wages and living costs. Sufficient UI benefits are especially important for the hospitality sector labor market in which workers regularly face short periods of unemployment. Inadequate UI benefits lead to high turn over in seasonal jobs like university food service and stadium concession, or hospitality jobs like our convention center or hotel members who routinely face short periods of unemployment due to fluctuations in tourism. For these workers to seek new employment every time there is a lull in hotel or convention bookings is both disruptive to our members lives and inefficient for business that must then retrain new hires when business returns.

We also support the new wage-indexed system for funding UI that appears in HB 188, which will ensuring that the UI Trust Fund grows in step and remains well funded.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on HB 188.