



Nicole Tortoriello, Managing Attorney
Workplace Justice Project
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, ext. 279
tortoriellon@publicjustice.org

SB886 – Consumer Protection and Employment – Food Service Facilities and Minimum Wage
Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee, March 11, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization that seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Workplace Justice Project promotes justice and equity in the workplace. We work to expand and enforce the rights of low-wage workers to receive an honest day's pay for an honest day's work in a safe, equitable workplace. **The PJC supports SB886, which would enshrine the right to a living wage for all workers in Maryland's constitution.**

SB886 would tie Maryland's minimum wage to the cost of living, ensuring workers in minimum wage jobs would make enough to support themselves. Every month during our Know Your Rights trainings, the PJC hears that the current minimum wage of \$15/hour is not enough to live on. A single person with no children needs to earn at least \$24.65/hour to survive, and a dual-income household with two children needs a minimum wage of at least \$30.63/hour.¹ Workers in Maryland just aren't earning enough to meet their basic needs.

Marylanders working minimum wage jobs already live paycheck to paycheck. While inflation has significantly increased prices from the gas pump to the grocery store, these workers continue to bring home the same pay. SB886 would allow minimum wage workers' earnings to automatically keep pace with the cost of living by indexing the minimum wage to the MIT Living Wage Calculator. SB886 will help maintain the purchasing power of Maryland's low wage workers, allowing their earnings to cover the same necessities from year to year—regardless of inflation.

SB886 would benefit Maryland's economy and decrease reliance on public benefits. Because low-income workers buy household necessities from local retailers, increasing the minimum wage will inject revenue into local economies. Additionally, state programs and service providers subsidize near-poverty wages by helping Maryland families cover basic necessities that their low wages make them unable to afford. For example, a full-time minimum wage worker and their child qualify for food stamps, Medicaid, and subsidized child care and housing. Increasing actual wages would allow for

¹ MIT Living Wage Calculator, *Living Wage Calculation for Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD*, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/12580> (Feb. 15, 2026).

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

greater financial independence and lessen the burden on public programs, while helping local economies.

SB886 would eliminate the subclass of workers earning the subminimum wage of \$3.63/hour. While employers are supposed to ensure workers' wages reach the minimum wage of \$15/hour after tips, we see that this frequently does not happen. Tipped workers are left with unpredictable, precarious wage rates. This uncertainty leads them to struggle with twice the poverty rate of other workers and the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry so that they do not jeopardize their tips by speaking up about mistreatment.²

Tipped workers should be receiving a full minimum wage as a way of protecting them from wage and hour violations. The Public Justice Center's Workplace Justice Project represents low-wage workers who are the victims of wage theft. Through our litigation and outreach, we know that wage laws are regularly violated. In fact, the restaurant industry is the largest employer of workers who earn less than minimum wage and almost 84 percent of restaurants partake in a wage and hour violation.³ Even if the law that employers must ensure tips are supplementing their employees' subminimum wage is being enforced, tipping is still a precarious and unreliable form of income that also subjecting workers to harassment of many forms.

Enshrining the right to a living wage for all workers in Maryland's constitution ensures that all workers will enjoy the same minimum wage rate that supports their basic needs. For the reasons discussed above, the Public Justice Center **SUPPORTS SB886** and requests a **FAVORABLE** report.

² One Fair Wage, *Maryland Workers Demand One Fair Wage*, https://02b81db4-71ed-49ed-b3fd-f3096ed3539b.usrfiles.com/ugd/02b81d_b84313b7956f423c8fe704b549bedd68.pdf (Feb. 1, 2024)

³ One Fair Wage, *One Fair Wage Myths & Facts*, https://02b81db4-71ed-49ed-b3fd-f3096ed3539b.usrfiles.com/ugd/02b81d_8f4bf22256994afbb60754acdfd7f613.pdf (last accessed Feb. 23, 2026)

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.