

Good afternoon; my name is Michelle Jeon and I'm a server and barista who has worked in multiple cities and states, most recently in Baltimore, Maryland. I have been in this line of work since 2018.

Under Maryland law, one of my employers is allowed to pay their servers as little as \$3.63 an hour because of our classification as tipped workers. How much I'm paid per day highly depends on how many customers were willing to tip us, and how generously. This is the case for my other work as barista and server as well, in which I'm paid a minimum wage of \$15 an hour with tips on top. I hold both of these jobs simultaneously, because in their slow season, they cut our hours, on top of already reduced tips. Some days as a server, I only took home \$70 for all my effort, and only because the few customers we did have felt bad for me enough to leave a bigger tip. Due to the unpredictable nature of tipped wages, for years I lived in constant anxiety about my finances and what I would do if an unexpected expense came up. *Even when I worked a managerial role*, my wages still needed to be supplemented for me to afford just the basics by donating blood plasma—until a doctor informed me I had developed intravascular scarring that could close up my veins if I continued donating on a regular basis.

There are arguments against raising the minimum wage, but I know from the proper research that's out there by organizations without a conflict of interest that doing this will *not* reduce jobs *nor* strain the economy. It's not the million- or billionaires that power small businesses; it's the regular everyday people like me who can and do go support local businesses when we aren't already forced to choose between food, insurance, or rent. I can also say from personal experience that the most I ever contributed to my local economy was when my employer recognized my value and paid me accordingly so that I could afford to go do anything *beyond simply paying bills*. And when I worked in Washington and California, states *without* a separate tipped minimum wage, people still tipped about the same percentage, between 15 to 18 percent on average.

Tip income is not a stable nor livable wage, and it shouldn't be legal to call it one. I'm asking this committee to pass HB1229—to end the subminimum wage; to pay tipped workers a full, fair living wage, with tips on top. Our work has dignity, and our wage should too. Thank you for your time.