



HB 1229 - Consumer Protection and Labor and Employment - Food Service Facilities and
Minimum Wage

House Government, Labor and Elections Committee

February 26, 2026

SUPPORT

Barb Haskell, Cage Cashier, Ocean Downs Casino

Member UNITE HERE Local 7

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of HB 1229. I have lived in Ocean City since 2000 and began working at Ocean Downs Casino as a cage cashier when it opened in 2011.

Maryland voters approved gaming because they were told it would produce good family supporting jobs, however 92 % of the non-tipped workers in our casino made less than \$40,000 last year. The Economic Policy Institute says that a living wage for one wage earner to support themselves and one child in Wicomico County is \$67,461 per year, far more than many of my co-workers make.

Cage Cashiers and Slot Attendants are classified as tipped employees. After over ten years at the Casino, I am paid \$15.91, but new workers in my department are paid only \$12.50. Ocean Downs uses the tip credit to make up the difference between the minimum wage and the wage they pay them. Recently a change in Trump's "Big, Beautiful Bill", that the gaming companies lobbied for, changed the threshold for taxing jackpots. As a result, the Casino no longer sends slot attendants out to hand pay jackpots under \$2000. With less customer interaction, our tips have decreased by 20%. For me this has meant a decrease of \$300 in some weeks and I expect that it will be an even bigger reduction in the busy season. This is hard for me, but I can't imagine how hard it is for my co-workers who make less than minimum wage.

This shows why a higher minimum wage is important for tipped workers. Tips are unreliable. We have been bargaining with our employer, Ocean Downs, since September. In all of those months, Churchill Downs, Ocean Downs' parent company has only increased their wage proposal from a 3% annual raise to a 3.25% annual raise. My co-workers and I are struggling. The price of groceries, gas, utilities and other household expense shas gone up far more than 3% every year for the past three years and we need to catch up.

For years the casino has been an exciting place to work. We love representing Ocean City. We take pride in our work and the happiness it brings people, but we need living wages. If we can't count on companies like Ocean Downs to do the right thing, than we need the Maryland General Assembly to make fair wages the law. For these reasons, my co-workers and I urge a favorable vote on HB 1229.