



Testimony for HB1229

Favorable

Consumer Protection and Labor and Employment – Food Service Facilities and

Minimum Wage

February 24, 2026

To: Honorable Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and the members of the

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

From: Kayla Mock, Political & Legislative Director

United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 400

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony on behalf of our over 10,000 members in Maryland, who work in grocery, retail, food distribution, cannabis, and health care. Through collective bargaining, our members raise the workplace standards of wages, benefits, safety, and retirement for all workers. Union members are critical to addressing inequality and uplifting the middle class.

Many of our members are the hardworking men and women who keep Maryland's grocery stores running, ensuring families have access to fresh food and essential goods.

We strongly support HB 1229, a voter referendum to raise the Maryland minimum wage to a living wage.

The top issue in every 2024 poll was affordability. Costs are rising, and wages are not keeping up. HB1229, if passed by Maryland voters, would amend the state constitution to create equity in the minimum wage by requiring all employers to pay all employees the full minimum wage, with tips on top, with no exceptions. The subminimum wage for tipped workers is a direct legacy of slavery and is both a racial and gender justice issue in Maryland.

It would also enact companion legislation establishing a minimum wage closer to the cost of living, as measured by the MIT Living Wage Calculator, which estimates the total cost of housing, food, transportation, and other necessities in counties and states relative to family size.

Maryland's minimum wage of \$15 an hour is far below the state's cost of living. The MIT Living Wage Calculator shows that a single person without children needs at least \$26.17 per hour to cover the basic cost of living in Maryland. This number increases to \$31.15 for a dual-income household with two children. According to the Economic Policy Institute, over 900,000 Maryland workers, or 33% of the workforce, make less than \$25 per hour.

We support HB1229 because we believe that if a job is worth doing, it should also yield a reasonable living.

For all these reasons and more, we urge a favorable report.