



Thursday, February 12, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells, Chair
The Honorable Kenneth Kerr, Vice Chair
142 and 145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Testimony of Ray Baker, Maryland Director, Baltimore DC Metro Building Trades Council on
HB 299: Fraud Prevention, Prevailing Wage, and Living Wage - Prohibitions, Penalties, and Enforcement
Position: FAVORABLE**

Thank you Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the committee for the opportunity to offer testimony on HB 299. My name is Ray Baker. I am the Maryland Director of the Baltimore-DC Building Trades (BDCBT). The BDCBT's 28 affiliates represent more than 30,000 union construction workers across Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

The BDCBT supports HB 299. This bill is a landmark piece of legislation that strengthens worker protections in Maryland. It will help combat workplace fraud, wage theft, and create a climate of accountability among construction contractors. It is also very much needed. A recent study found Maryland leads US States in wage theft violations. The study analyzed US Department of Labor data and calculated that companies in Maryland committed more than 12,600 wage theft violations between 2023 and 2025, with an average of \$2,200 in back wages owed per employee.

HB 299 is chock full of game-changing improvements to protect workers. We especially appreciate that the bill stipulates that general contractors, including those on public works projects, are liable for violations committed by subcontractors *regardless* of whether there is a direct contractual relationship between the two. Tied in with that, the bill establishes legal consequences for contractors and subcontractors who underpay the state's unemployment insurance fund because they have fraudulently classified workers as independent contractors.

Another key element of the bill is that it allocates a portion of the fines collected to be used as restitution for wage theft victims. Too often these victims are never made whole.

Finally, we support the bill because it authorizes both DOL and the OAG to conduct compliance investigations and cultivates a culture of collaboration between the two agencies by requiring them to meet monthly and share information. This is an important change. A partnership between state agencies and the OAG is vital to combat wage theft, ensure good contractors are positively rewarded, and perhaps most important to legislators in this trying time, ensure that Maryland is tapping every available revenue resource. This legislation promises to do so without inconveniencing working people or responsible businesses.

The BDCBT urges a favorable report on HB 299.

Ray Baker
Maryland Director, BDCBT