



## HB 1229

### Consumer Protection and Labor and Employment - Food Service Facilities and Minimum Wage

**Position:** Favorable

Dear Chair Wells and members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation, with 10,000 members in Maryland and Washington, DC across the care continuum – nursing homes, hospitals, and federally qualified health centers. We support HB 1229 because a living wage will support our state's care infrastructure and the care workforce.

Maryland's minimum wage of \$15 an hour is far below the cost of living in the state. According to the Economic Policy Institute, over 900,000 Maryland workers, or 33% of the workforce, make less than \$25 per hour. Maryland's lowest-wage workers need tax relief and wage increases to meet the cost of living. Our healthcare workers are overworked, short staffed, and underpaid all while working multiple jobs to make ends meet.

As Maryland's aging population grows, the demand for the services of home health aides and personal care aides will continue to increase. The demand is demonstrated by Maryland's Medicaid Waiver waitlist for home and community-based services which is the third longest in the country with over 26,000 residents waiting for home care services. Despite the increasing demand and essential nature of home care, the caregiving work of personal care aides is still not valued- workers receive extremely low pay, few benefits and enjoy limited protections. Home care workers are still earning as low as \$15 per hour with very little job security. In Maryland, there are approximately 51,200 direct care workers, the majority of whom are Black and women of color. This legislation will have a transformative impact on home care workers' ability to stay in the field and in turn improve the state's ability to deliver high quality care to our state's most vulnerable.

We know that our nursing homes and hospitals would not function without the environmental service workers, dietary aides, support staff, technician, and certified nursing assistants who struggle to make ends meet without a living wage. For 1199 SEIU, HB 1229 is about ensuring we take care of our healthcare workers and create healthier communities.

For those reasons we urge a favorable report on HB 1229.

Sincerely,

Ricarra Jones

Political Director | 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers Union