

February 24, 2026

The Honorable Delegate Melissa Wells, Chair
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Opposition to HB 1479

Dear Chair Wells and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce, representing almost 700 organizations with over 40,000 employees, I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 1479 because it combines a significant wage increase with permanent automatic escalators that will directly affect Maryland business' ability to hire and grow. HB 1479 would raise the minimum wage to \$18 per hour by 2028 and then require automatic annual increases tied to inflation, with no authority to pause those increases even during an economic downturn.

For our businesses, both large and small, this bill would reduce or delay hiring, limit employee hours, increase prices, and postpone planned expansion and/or investment. These are real impacts on Maryland business and families. They affect job availability, advancement opportunities, and long-term growth in our community.

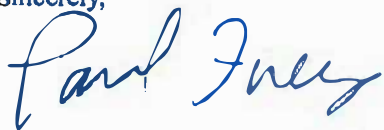
Although the bill provides a one-year delay for some employers, it ultimately locks all covered businesses into permanent automatic increases. When wage increases are mandated year after year without flexibility, employers have fewer options to preserve jobs and create new ones. Over time, that limits entry-level opportunities and slows economic growth.

WalletHub recently ranked Maryland 49th for opening a business. We also rank 46th for tax climate and 37th nationally for business friendliness. At a time when businesses have more choices than ever, these signals should not be ignored. Adding ongoing increases to payroll-related costs will limit employers' hiring flexibility, affect the ability of small and mid-sized businesses to remain competitive, and will force businesses to leave the state. Legislation like HB 1479 will help determine whether Maryland becomes a place for businesses to grow – or a state to rule out.

The Chamber supports competitive wages and support for our workforce. But policy must balance wage growth with job growth.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 1479.

Sincerely,



Paul Frey, IOM
President and CEO

GROWTH.
COMMUNITY.
SUCCESS.

