



Maryland Forests Association, Inc.

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Maryland's voice for forest, wildlife, and natural resource management

February 24, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells, Chair

The Honorable Kenneth Kerr, Vice-Chair

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Dear Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Maryland Forests Association (MFA), representing Maryland's forest supply chain, we respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to House Bill 1229.

Maryland's forestry sector is not built on minimum-wage jobs. As documented in the *Maryland Forestry Economic Adjustment Strategy* and reinforced in the *Maryland Rural Business Innovation Initiative (BEACON) Report*, forestry is a multi-billion-dollar industry that supports skilled, rural manufacturing jobs across this state. These are heavy equipment operators. CDL drivers. Sawyers. Millwrights. Supervisors. Plant managers. They are trained, safety-certified, and highly skilled. And they are already paid accordingly.

When the government mandates a significant increase in the minimum wage, it does not stop at the bottom rung. It compresses wages across the entire operation. If entry-level pay rises substantially, supervisors and experienced operators must also be raised to maintain fairness and responsibility differentials. That multiplies payroll impact far beyond what headline numbers suggest. Our manufacturers compete every single day with facilities in Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the Carolinas. They sell into regional and global markets where prices are set by competition- not by Maryland policy. They cannot simply pass along higher labor costs. When margins tighten, businesses automate, reduce hiring, delay reinvestment, or shift production elsewhere.

The Forestry Economic Adjustment Strategy was commissioned because Maryland has already lost manufacturing capacity. We should be focused on rebuilding that infrastructure, not accelerating its decline.

Forestry offers one of the few remaining career ladders in rural Maryland. Entry-level positions lead to skilled trades, which then lead to leadership roles. That structure rewards effort, training, and experience. Compressing wages at the bottom weakens that incentive system. It is also important to note that the majority of Maryland's primary manufacturers and logging companies are family-owned businesses, not large corporations.

HB 1229 may be well-intentioned, but for rural manufacturing, it functions as a structural cost increase that threatens competitiveness, job stability, and future investment. It also threatens forests, our greatest renewable resource. Their existence and management depend on the strong, stable markets that our manufacturing businesses provide. Having wages built upon production and merit, not mandates, will ensure forest health and a strong forest economy.

For these reasons, the Maryland Forests Association respectfully urges an unfavorable report on behalf of our members.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth D. Hill
Executive Director
Maryland Forests Association