



Testimony in Support of HB295 Economic Matters - Maryland Minimum Wage Act of 2014

House Economic Matters Committee
February 11, 2014

Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly supports HB295, which will raise Maryland's state minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour by 2016, index the minimum wage to the cost of inflation and increase wages for tipped workers.

HB295 aids families who experience hunger in Maryland. Maryland Hunger Solutions is a statewide, anti-hunger advocacy organization. We believe we can end hunger in Maryland and increasing the state minimum wage is central to this mission. Every day we hear from low-wage workers trying to raise their families and make ends meet. Through our work to educate eligible recipients about and increase participation in federal nutrition programs – such as school meals, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), -- we see hardworking Marylanders who simply do not earn enough to provide the nutritious meals that they and their families need. We strongly urge support of House Bill 295 because raising Maryland's minimum wage is an important policy that will benefit working families and stimulate the economy through increased consumer spending on the goods and services they need, including food.

HB295 will help more working families achieve economic independence. The single biggest step we can take to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of Maryland workers would be to raise the minimum wage. While food safety net programs are vital, raising the minimum wage will help more Maryland families move towards greater economic independence. According to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), increasing the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour would raise pay for 455,000 working Marylanders, nearly a quarter of whom are parents. In fact, approximately 210,000 Maryland children live in households with at least one parent making minimum wage who would receive a raise if this legislation passed. We want to ensure that all people, particularly children, have the food they need to learn, grow and thrive, and here in Maryland, we can do better.

HB295 will index the minimum wage to the increasing cost of living. House Bill 295 creates a three-step plan to increase the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour by July 1, 2016. The legislation also indexes the state minimum wage to keep pace with the rising cost of living, ensuring that the minimum wage does not lose value over time and increases the paychecks of those in industries that rely on tips from 50 to 70 percent of the regular minimum wage. It is critical to address the important economic disparities in our society by raising the floor and ensuring that low wage workers benefit from their labor. We know that hunger is a symptom of poverty and poverty is a consequence of policy. Increasing the minimum wage is one of the very best policy options we have to reduce poverty, inequality, and hunger. We strongly support all three core provisions and believe they are essential to a meaningful increase in the minimum wage.

There are nearly 800,000 Marylanders, more than 330,000 of whom are children, who rely on the Food Supplement Program (FSP, federally known as SNAP). Many of the recipients are working adults. FSP is an important lifeline for them but we know with certainty that if they were able to earn more, their families could achieve a better standard of living.

Finally, I'd like to point out that a 2014 poll of Maryland residents found that an overwhelming 82 percent support raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour and tying it to the cost of living.

We urge a favorable report for this important legislation.

Please contact Michael J. Wilson at 410-528-0021 x27 if you have any additional questions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Wilson".

Michael J. Wilson, Director
Maryland Hunger Solutions

Maryland Hunger Solutions is a state-wide organization working to end hunger, promote nutrition, and improve well-being for Marylanders in need through education, advocacy, outreach and collaboration.

Maryland Hunger Solutions focuses on improving and increasing participation in federal nutrition programs to ensure that everyone has access to adequate healthy food every day.