



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Shared Voices for Liberal Religious Values in Maryland

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 166:

Labor and Employment – Payment of Wages – Minimum Wage and Enforcement 2

(Fight for Fifteen)

TO: Hon. Dereck E. Davis, Chair, and members of the House Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Craig Beyler, Chair, Task Force for Economic Justice, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

DATE: February 3, 2019

As a community of faith, Unitarian Universalists affirm the dignity and worth of all people. It's a bedrock principle that we hold dear and promote throughout the community. There is a dignity that arises out of work, work that supports one's family and community. No one who works full time should need to rely upon public assistance. That is an unwarranted and unnecessary attack on the dignity of all people.

All workers should be able to be proud of their work and their ability to support their family. The existing minimum wage does not provide a living wage and requires workers to apply for public assistance to support their families. This is not only an indignity, it is ineffective public policy. Raising the minimum wage to a living wage is far more efficient, effective, and dignified way to achieve basic well-being of the families of Maryland workers.

In effect the current system of inadequate minimum wage along with public assistance is a subsidy to business, allowing them to pay an artificially low wage, knowing that government will make up the difference. We all have read the newspaper articles about large and small businesses alike whose employees are dependent on public assistance, while the corporation makes handsome profits. Be clear, it is the government who is subsidizing the profits of companies in this way. Government violates the dignity of low wage workers in order to subsidize corporate profits, and they do it with our money.

Studies of the effect of increasing the minimum wage clearly show that the costs are absorbed and workers benefit. Our neighbor, Washington DC has enacted the \$15 minimum wage, and there is no crisis that has arisen out of that change. What has changed is that the dignity of DC low wage earners has been enhanced. At the same time, government benefits through reductions in the cost of public assistance. Businesses should be required to pay a living wage and government should be relieved of the burdens of subsidizing business. That should be our social contract. Workers should be paid a living wage and government should only need to help those who cannot help themselves.

This bill benefits all Marylanders and needs to be kept strong with no carve-outs or exceptions. No preemption provisions can be allowed.

Good and functional communities are made up of engaged and proud citizens. Citizens who are able to earn a living wage and support their families. Each citizen deserves to know the dignity of work and the dignity of supporting their families. We owe that to all Marylanders. Please support the Fight for \$15.