



HB166 - Labor and Employment - Payment of Wages - Minimum Wage and Enforcement (Fight for Fifteen)

Presented to the Hon. Dereck E. Davis and members of the House Economic Matters Committee.

February 8, 2019 12:30pm

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **encourages the House Economic Matters Committee to support HB0166, Labor and Employment - Payment of Wages - Minimum Wage and Enforcement (Fight for Fifteen)**, sponsored by Delegate Fennell.

Our organisation is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice which includes the rights of women to a fair wage at work. This means that Marylanders who work full time should have the right to a living wage that supports a life above the poverty line. This is a necessary step to reduce poverty in the state of Maryland – which was at 9.3% in 2018 according to ThinkPoverty¹, the second highest level of any state in the country – by giving more employees the ability to rise in income. This bill effectively raises the minimum wage to a living wage of \$15 but over a period of some years. This means that businesses have time to adjust to the wage increases and small businesses in particular will be able to handle the change in finance. This means that the bill is fair to both employers and employees. Another key problem that this bill aims to fix is the reliance upon tips for some employees to achieve even a minimum wage, this bill would increase their wages to \$15 giving them the wage security that they need. In every state, working mothers of very young children are disproportionately represented in low wage occupations so these provisions would significantly help working women and their families.

The absence of a living wage has severe consequences for working women in Maryland. It forces them into poverty despite working full time and can leave them food insecure as well as generally financially insecure. Families are left with inadequate supplies and less access to necessities such as healthcare. Women should not struggle more than men to meet their basic needs AND afford to exercise their reproductive freedom. The reproductive lives of women cost more than those of men. When the marketplace diminishes the exchange rate of women's work, use of a reliable contraceptive method can become inconsistent, the ability to terminate a pregnancy proves difficult, and access to the full range of birthing options is limited. Increased income for all means more individuals can access necessary reproductive technology to realize family formation goals or open their homes to care for adoptive or foster care children. If earned income does not meet expectations to cover more than basic needs, choices are made whether to delay becoming a parent or add to one's existing family. The MIT living wage calculator puts the Maryland living wage at \$15.08² an hour. This wage would give working women stability, a feeling of security, and far more reproductive choice. This will also help employers as their employees will have better morale due to lowered stress and so will be better able to work.

This bill also has provisions to protect working women in other ways. Employers will be unable to threaten employees with reporting suspected immigration status if they make a complaint against the employer. This

¹ Talk Poverty. (2019). *Maryland Report - 2018 - Talk Poverty*. [online] Available at: <https://talkpoverty.org/state-year-report/maryland-2018-report/> [Accessed 29 Jan. 2019].

² Glasmeier, D. (2019). *Living Wage Calculator - Living Wage Calculation for Maryland*. [online] Livingwage.mit.edu. Available at: <http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/24> [Accessed 29 Jan. 2019].

means that women will be more able to ensure that their rights and dignity are being respected without fear of retribution and will be better able to secure their income for their family.

The consequences of not implementing this bill are numerous. Women in full-time minimum wage jobs and their families will continue to be forced to live in poverty and deal with the effects of that. Those who rely on tips to earn a full wage will continue to live in an insecure situation with a varying income. Women's reproductive options will continue to be limited. It will continue to be difficult for some women to stand up for their rights without fear of retribution.

We strongly support full-time working women having greater wage security, dignity and living above the poverty line. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges **favorable committee reports on HB0166**. Thank you for your time and consideration.