



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Testimony of Councilmember Marc Elrich (At-large)
In Support of Senate Bill 543
Labor and Employment - Payment of the Minimum Wage Required (Fight for Fifteen)

Finance Committee
March 8, 2018

I am here to express my strong support for SB 543, which would raise the minimum wage to \$15 by July 2023.

As you may know, I am the sponsor of a similar bill that passed the Montgomery County Council unanimously and was signed into law by the County Executive this past November.

As I see it, the minimum wage is ultimately about working people being able to earn enough to put a roof over their heads, feed their families, and not have to choose between food on the table and medical visits. It is about addressing this fundamental economic insecurity

I am particularly passionate about this issue because I taught in a high-poverty school in Montgomery County for 17 years, and I saw up close the effects of poverty. I watched poor children come to school hungry and unable to focus on learning. These same children - and many other poor children -- live in homes where their parents are highly stressed about how they will be able to continue to afford rent and other basic necessities of life. That stress has an enormous impact on the children, and those impacts have lasting effects. When parents are worrying about keeping a roof over their heads, it is impossible for a child not to feel their parents' uncertainty.

Economic insecurity is not just an adult problem – it is a family problem. Studies show the link between stress and negative health impacts – in both adults and children. Studies also link stress and depression and poverty and depression, and we all know that depression can impair decision making. Raising the minimum wage can help address these issues and is thus good for families and schools.

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Raising the minimum wage is also good for neighborhoods and the economy: when poor families have more money to spend, they will spend it at local businesses.

Numerous studies have looked into the effects of local minimum wage increases and found that they raise wages without negatively impacting employment.¹

By raising the minimum wage, we are asking ‘what it does it take to live in America and how do make sure that everybody is safe and secure and able to raise their kids?’ Whether a person is flipping burgers, cleaning bathrooms, emptying garbage or doing any other work, with this legislation, a fair minimum wage honors work and family.

When President Franklin Roosevelt put forward the original minimum wage, it was explicitly intended to meet basic needs. If the minimum wage nationally had been tied to inflation from the beginning, we would not have to be here today. With this legislation, wages are being recouped to the original purpose of the minimum wage and correcting a historic injustice.

And because this bill includes indexing for inflation, we will not repeat the national mistake of letting the minimum wage lose value over time.

I grew up being told that a fair day’s work should get a fair day’s pay. It was part of the American Dream at one time. The poor people among us probably put us to shame for the number of hours they work in order to put so little on the table. There is no reason not to have a floor on wages that provides for the basics in life.

I urge your support for this legislation and hope that Maryland will take a leadership role on this important issue. I thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ <http://www.upjohn.org/publications/upjohn-institute-press/what-does-minimum-wage-do> and http://jaredbernsteinblog.com/the-minimum-wage-increase-and-the-cbos-job-loss-estimate/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+JaredBernstein+%28Jared+Bernstein%29 and <https://www.hendrix.edu/news/news.aspx?id=64671>