



**Testimony:
Nikki Klock
Therapist Case Manager
Health Care for the Homeless**

Before the

Maryland Senate: Finance Committee

On

**SB 543: Labor and Employment – Payment of the Minimum Wage Required
(Fight for Fifteen)
SUPPORT**

March 7, 2018
3 East Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland

Thank you, Chairman Middleton and members of the Finance Committee. My name is Nikki Klock and I am a therapist and case manager in the Supportive Housing program at Health Care for the Homeless in Baltimore. I am writing to provide testimony in support of SB 543.

As part of an organization that believes housing is health care, and as a provider whose clients transition from street or shelter homelessness to more stable homes, I assess whether a client's income is enough to live off of, based on their cost of housing.

The cost of fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Baltimore City is currently \$1,125. An individual working 40 hours a week at Maryland's soon-to-be minimum wage of \$10.10 starting July 1, earns a gross income of \$1,616 a month. I assist many of my clients with monthly budgets and, in the process, have seen first-hand their struggle to afford groceries, phone minutes and bus money with what is left after paying for utility bills and rent. My clients benefit from living in apartments where rent falls below the fair market rate, and from receiving rent subsidies. I imagine the budgets of low-income tenants who pay full rent involve even more impossible sacrifices at the current minimum wage.

On more than one occasion, my clients have asked, "Where do I go from here?" after they have received housing. They want to be independent, from Health Care for the Homeless and from relying on rent subsidies. They want to be able to afford their own housing, on their own. But they feel hindered by policies over which they have no control. Such challenges are particularly stark among our clients with disabilities who, because of the toll of work on their physical and behavioral health, have to work an incredibly long time before they can save up enough to pay for their most basic needs and life costs. The added stressors of poverty and homelessness correspond directly with depression, anxiety and other conditions that affect people's ability to work.

A \$15/hr. minimum wage can help offset the amount of time some clients are not able to work. Clients with children are also limited in the hours that they can work, even though they have greater expenses. At the current minimum wage, my clients cannot afford to save money. A \$15/hr. minimum wage would give my clients hope as we work through their plans for their future, and it would reduce their dependence on other forms of assistance.

Maryland has the highest median income in America, and yet 10% of our population lives in poverty. As the wealth disparity gap increases, we need a statewide standard of humane and livable wages for all. Individual jurisdictions, including Baltimore City, cannot afford to compete with each other over wages; we look to Annapolis to set the statewide standard of a \$15/hr. minimum wage. We cannot settle for anything less, as the cost of living continues to rise and hardworking people are increasingly unable to make ends meet. If working clients at Health Care for the Homeless are paid a higher minimum wage, then there is a stronger chance they can leave their homelessness behind and begin life anew and autonomously.

We support SB 543 and believe the Fight for \$15 is essential to the fight for health equity and ending homelessness. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions if you contact me at NKlock@hchmd.org.