



## Testimony in Support of SB 280

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

TO: Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee  
FROM: Demaune Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore  
DATE: February 21, 2019

Family League supports Senate Bill 280, which would raise the state's minimum wage to \$15 per hour and tie future increases to growth rates in the Consumer Price Index. This is a step in the direction toward economic equity to raise the prospects of low-wage earners, particularly workers of color. Out of full-time employees earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty limit, the majority are people of color.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Latinx workers currently face the highest and fastest growing rates of working poverty.<sup>2</sup> People of color also reside in food deserts at a disparate rate. Eight percent (8%) of White Baltimoreans live in food deserts, as compared to 34% of Black residents.<sup>3</sup> Raising the minimum wage would enable families to better meet their own economic needs.

Low and stagnant wage growth in Baltimore City is correlated directly with food<sup>4</sup> and housing<sup>5</sup> insecurity. One quarter of Baltimore City residents live in food deserts; areas defined as having a disproportionate lack of access to grocery stores and healthy food options. For Baltimore's children, that number is even higher, with one out of every three children living in food deserts.<sup>6</sup>

Additional struggles faced by low-wage workers manifest in the form of housing insecurity for these residents. The United Way of Central Maryland's ALICE Report notes that each parent in a family of four would need to earn just over \$30 per hour for that family to be considered in "Household Survival" mode.<sup>7</sup> However, in Baltimore City, the median household income in Baltimore is only \$42,665, meaning 45% of residents are struggling to meet their basic needs<sup>8</sup>. To move from Household Survival to Household Stability<sup>9</sup>, both parents in that same four-person family would need to earn over \$60 per hour. As such, any increase in the state's minimum wage moves working families in Baltimore closer to housing stability and food security.

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, A. (July 2016). *An Overview of America's Working Poor*. Policy Link. <http://www.policylink.org/data-in-action/overview-america-working-poor>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Buczynski, A., Freishtat, H., & Buzogany, S. (2015). *Mapping Baltimore City's Food Environment: 2015 Report*.

<sup>4</sup> Rodgers, W. (September, 2016). *The Impact of a \$15 Minimum Wage on Hunger in America*. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/the-impact-of-a-15-minimum-wage-on-hunger-in-america/>

<sup>5</sup> United Way (2018). *Alice: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*.

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/3dzv891g057jaz8/18\\_UW\\_ALICE\\_Report\\_MD\\_Refresh\\_9.11.18\\_Lowres.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/3dzv891g057jaz8/18_UW_ALICE_Report_MD_Refresh_9.11.18_Lowres.pdf?dl=0)

<sup>6</sup> Buczynski, A., Freishtat, H., & Buzogany, S. (2015). *Mapping Baltimore City's Food Environment: 2015 Report*. Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. <http://mdfoodsystemmap.org/2015-baltimore-city-food-access-map/>

<sup>7</sup> Minimum household temporary stability.

<sup>8</sup> United Way (2016). *Alice: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*.

<sup>9</sup> Longer-term sustainable living

Through our work with B'More for Healthy Babies, we have seen firsthand the impacts that stable housing has on public health and on the wellbeing of new mothers and infants. The Baltimore City Child Fatality Review has determined that housing instability significantly contributes to low birthweight and preterm birth — the leading cause of infant death in Baltimore City – at seven times the risk.<sup>10</sup>

Family League also recognizes the importance of supporting traditionally overlooked populations, such as the 20% of Baltimore youth identified as “opportunity youth,”<sup>11</sup> who are between the ages of 16 and 24, out of school, and under- or unemployed. Ensuring the establishment of pathways to financial security is critical for this population as they enter the workforce, and has the potential to completely transform the economic prospects of entire communities. As such, we urge a favorable report on HB 166.

As the designated Local Management Board for the City of Baltimore, Family League’s mission is to serve as an architect of change by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. This work is guided by the State’s Child Well-being Results Areas. We support SB 280 in particular due to its alignment with the result areas by working to ensure that “Babies are Born Healthy,” and that “Families are Safe and Economically Stable.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Costa, Cathy (2012). *The Need For Stable Housing For Pregnant Women And Babies In Baltimore*.

[http://www.healthybabiesbaltimore.com/uploads/file/pdfs/Housing%20Instability%20and%20Birth%20Outcomes\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.healthybabiesbaltimore.com/uploads/file/pdfs/Housing%20Instability%20and%20Birth%20Outcomes_pdf.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Annie E. Casey (January 2018). *Reshaping Workforce Development in Baltimore: Ensuring Community Voice and Expertise Guide Us*. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/reshaping-workforce-development-in-baltimore/>

<sup>12</sup> Maryland Governor’s Office for Children. “Maryland’s Child Well-Being Scorecard.” <https://goc.maryland.gov/reportcard/>