

Chair Walsh, Vice-Chair Jones, Members Jung, Rigby, and Yungmann, good evening. My name is Kelly Klinefelter, and I am the president of Howard Progressive Project. It is with humble gratitude that I join you tonight to testify in support of CB-82.

Howard Progressive Project's central organizing principle is community. We envision a more just and equitable Howard County, a place where every person can grow to their fullest potential. With access to our excellent schools, our beautiful outdoor spaces, our top-notch health care system, our panoply of cultural institutions and retail services, every person can seize their dream and thrive.

But not everyone has the same access to our community's bounty. And that's because in this place that is so great for so many, in this county that is consistently listed as one of the wealthiest, most-educated in the nation, one in four of us struggles to make ends meet every month.

These struggling community members are our childcare workers and public school support staff. We value our children, and yet we fail to value the work of those who teach, nurture, feed, and support them enough to pay them a living wage. We at Howard Progressive Project are passionate supporters of our schools and the people who work in them, and we support CB-82 knowing that Dr. Jones and Ms. Rigby are working diligently to ensure the inclusion of all HCPSS workers in the provisions of the bill.

These struggling community members are the folks who clean and support the operations of our health care system. As Anne Brown, a health care worker from Columbia, says, "We do not take care of those people who take care of us!"

These struggling community members staff the restaurants and retail establishments that make Howard County an exciting and convenient place to live. We cannot function as a community without the folks who cook our food, stock our shelves, make our coffee, and man our cash registers. And yet we leave them at the end of each month without enough money to pay the bills. Howard County resident Amy Jackson explains her situation like this: I no longer work in Howard County, but moved to Montgomery to work as I make \$15/hour there doing the same work I was doing in Howard County for \$13/hour.

Our community would not function without their work. Our comfortable lifestyles, our children's educations, our health and wellness, our conveniences -- all these things we value would be IMPOSSIBLE without the work of our neighbors. And yet we leave them to struggle. This is a moral outrage.

Howard Progressive Project conceived of the Living Wage coalition because we believed that a problem so deeply entrenched required an urgent, united community response. We're deeply grateful to our coalition partners, councilmembers Walsh, Yung, Rigby, and Jones, who attended our kickoff rally on September 15, and to Council Vice-chair Jones and Councilwoman Rigby, who responded so quickly to the call to action with CB-82.

Howard Progressive Project supports CB-82 because it will increase the minimum wage to \$15 in 2023 and to \$16 in 2025 for most workers. This wage increase will affect 25% of all Howard county workers, including 30% of working women, 33% of Black workers, 51% of Latino workers, and 25% of API workers.

As a teacher, I am most excited about the effects of CB-82 on children. Teachers know when families struggle, children struggle, and research shows this, too. The higher wages provided by CB-82 will help families to feed their children, to spend more on books and toys, and to decrease their children's anxiety. Study after study shows that higher incomes are connected to improved educational outcomes.

While CB-82 bill does not provide a true living wage for workers in Howard County, Howard Progressive Project supports CB-82 as a major step forward for the workers of our community. As Council Chair Walsh said at our Living Wage rally, "We can and should lead on this issue. It's time to lift our nearest neighbors, our dearest neighbors, our hardest working neighbors, to a living wage. And we can do it now. It's time for a \$15 minimum wage in Howard County." CB-82 does that, and more.

For too long most of us have enjoyed the vast prosperity of our great American economy and all the amenities that Howard County has to offer. But we have done that at the expense of the 28% of our community whose work is every bit as essential as yours and mine but doesn't pay enough to pay the bills at the end of the month. Let's fix that. Let's pass CB-82 as a step toward a living wage in Howard County.