

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson and the Committee of the Whole / DC Council, for allowing me an opportunity to share my comments on Initiative 77. I am here today to testify in FAVOR of Initiative 77's full implementation.

Honestly, I wish we were not back here, as I am sure a number of us are. My name is Chantal Coudoux. I am a DC native who grew up in Ward 6, moved to Ward 4 and then returned to Ward 6. This city is part of me as is the restaurant industry. I have been a tipped worker on and off for more than a decade both here and in California. I also worked for ROC and another DC non-profit so I am happy to know that many of you who I have worked closely with on other issues are taking this very seriously. I am, however, astounded and angry that we are here having a discussion about an initiative passed with a majority of DC voters. The fact that the council has taken steps to repeal something that voters overwhelmingly approved while simultaneously denouncing the trump administration for its threats to DC's communities and autonomy is frankly inexcusable.

As a restaurant worker and as a DC native, your actions disgust me. Added to this is the fact that restaurants paid workers to protest 77 on election day, the fact that restaurants asked staff to wear no on 77 buttons, the fact that restaurants have taken actions against staff that refused or the fact that I know folks at bigger restaurant companies who are very pro 77 but could not be vocal for fear of losing their jobs. All of this is despicable.

As the daughter of a refugee, I prioritize the folks who work support staff roles for the most part, and do not make 60k or 80k a year in this industry; the folks who came to DC not because of the trendy restaurant scene but because of other global forces; the folk who if they lose their jobs, cannot just hounce to the next one; the folk who make restaurants run but aren't up front and center; the folk who might not speak English as their first language; the folk who like my father cannot vote in the U.S. because of immigration status or incarceration. These are the folks who are victims of wage theft, who will not bring up to an employer that they did not receive minimum wage because this would cost them shifts or their job entirely.

To be very clear, I am not one of those people. I was born with skin color privilege, the "right" nationality and the "correct" native language. But these folks are my blood and chosen family. I say all this not because they need me to "save them" or their tips or to speak for them, but in solidarity with workers whose voices were never heard in the conversation. I talked with these folks; I listened when they told me it did not matter if they spoke up or they were too scared to given the racist administration we are facing or they had no trust in a council to not overturn the initiative. Yes, industry people were split but, the electorate heard these lost voices. You apparently did not, just as you are choosing to ignore voices of the electorate.

I also say this because in a time when facts are being conflated and we are facing an administration that is dismantling things that our ancestors fought for it is important to be clear about where we stand. I do not stand with the servers and bartenders who have many privileges and voices in this fight; the ones for whom Chairman Mendelson is a hero.

Chairman Mendelson, a hero who shows up at meetings and promises the repeal of something voters, the very people who voted him into power, approved by more votes than for some council members, people in all but one ward of this city. And, repeal by the very governing body that approved his election to the position of chair.

I do stand with people in an industry that I love and care about who believe we all deserve to make a living wage in addition to our tips; that our tips should reflect our devotion to this industry.

We can continue to pretend that DC is a sanctuary city with all that broadly encompasses; we can continue to pass progressive policies that then get repealed or underfunded or completely stripped of any teeth or we can be the city that sets a moral compass during a time of increasing white supremacy and war on those living in poverty because of the very policies you all enact, or, in this case, repeal.