

Good evening and thank you Chairman Mendelson and the Committee of the Whole for giving me this opportunity to share my comments in support of enacting Initiative 77. My name is David Sexton and I am a Ward 4 Resident. I was a tipped worker in D.C. for 2 years and left for another industry in September of 2017.

I am here to testify in support of the full implementation of Initiative 77. As a former tipped employee in the District of Columbia, I can attest that the current wage system is volatile and hostile to workers. The subminimum wage of \$3.89 per hour is little more than a tax buffer, meaning tips are the only way for servers to make ends meet. When the cost of labor is subsidized by customers, pay is unpredictable and changes every period. Anything from weather, illness, or a customer's mood could impact tips. A bad night or week could mean working more shifts the next, leading to irregular schedules and unpredictable results. The lack of a safety net often led to difficult decisions. Without a fair wage, I felt compelled to go to work sick because I was afraid to lose the money. As a Type 1 Diabetic, I often worked through episodes of high and low blood sugar instead of taking breaks or going home.

Under a tipped wage system, workers make less than minimum wage whenever they work outside of service periods. For example, I spent up to a quarter of my shifts at a service job cleaning, restocking, and closing down the dining room to prepare for the next service. Because there were no customers during this period, my colleagues and I earned less than \$4 an hour for our hard work. This drags down the average wage, borrowing from "good shifts" to offset these paltry earnings. It's an unequal system that requires workers to maintain the owner's property and get little in return. This is an unfair, two-tiered wage system that no white collar employee would accept. Tipped workers deserve the same.

It doesn't have to be this way. Initiative 77 will raise the base minimum wage without eliminating tips, which would reduce poverty and regulate incomes for tipped workers. It would mean that slow shifts, opening and closing work, and sick days wouldn't threaten a worker's ability to make ends meet. Opponents of Initiative 77 have argued that the restaurant industry cannot afford an eight-year incremental increase, but we know that is untrue. The movement to repeal Initiative 77 has been bankrolled by the National Restaurant Association and management consultants, and is backed by members of the House Freedom Caucus. When powerful interests publicly claim that the initiative is unaffordable, then spend hundreds of thousands of dollars pitching to progressive-minded voters, we should question if they truly advocate for workers' best interests.

To Chairman Mendelson and the Council, thank you again for allowing me to share my support for Initiative 77, which is rooted in my experience as a tipped worker here in the District. I sincerely hope that you will respect the will of your constituents and uphold the Initiative as decided. Thank you.