

Dear Council Members,

My name is Eric Harris Bernstein and I have been a bartender most of my adult life. I have bartended in five cities, including for two years right here in DC, where I made a base wage of around \$3 per hour. Now that I am pursuing my graduate education in the Bay Area, I have returned to bartending in order to support myself. In my current position, like all tipped workers in California, I make the full minimum wage of \$13.23. I make that in addition to tips, which – just like here – hover between 17 and 22 percent of sales.

I told this to a friend who bartends in the Penn Quarter and he was shocked. He had assumed, based on the National Restaurant Association's talking points, that tipping had disappeared in California. That is the degree to which NRA scare tactics have defined and misdirected this debate. I am here to correct the record.

I am here to tell you that this additional base pay will make an enormous difference in the lives of your constituents, as it has in mine. It will lift families out of poverty, as it has in other fair wage cities and states. And it will improve the restaurant industry, as it has in booming fair wage restaurant towns like Seattle and Portland.

The tip credit system pulls tipped workers down towards the minimum wage, instead of building them up beyond it. The artificially low cost of restaurant labor incentivizes over-staffing and cultivates a careless mindset when it comes to managing worker schedules. I explained this to Councilmember Bonds and she replied, "but that's the law."

Council members, I am here to tell you: The law is the problem. Restaurant workers have a right to a reasonable base pay that does not eat into their tips. It is fine to have an incentive structure, but we must establish a fair, true base pay. No other industry is exempt from this obligation, and while many tipped workers make an excellent living, nearly 14 percent of DC's tipped workers live in poverty.

If restaurants finally invested in their workers as other businesses do, they would end up with a more stable and loyal staff. That would be much cheaper and more efficient than the costly cycle of high turnover in which many restaurants are currently trapped.

The NRA does not want a fair and efficient system. They have instead funded an aggressive public misinformation campaign, which infiltrated workplaces and pressured workers every day for months, spreading absurd theories about diners flowing into Virginia and Maryland, about the end of tipping, and about the end of full service restaurants. None of this has come to pass in any fair wage city and it will not happen here.

To the restaurant workers of DC, I would say this: Groups on both sides of this debate have failed you. The NRA spread deliberate falsehoods, and the pro-77 movement failed to counter them. So take it from one of your own: You have nothing to fear, and much to gain from the more just and equitable system that 77 will usher in. You deserve the full minimum wage, in addition to tips. That is what workers in fair wage states are getting, and that is the future of compensation in the restaurant industry.

There are so many good arguments for this initiative, but the best one is that DC voters passed it. Some have questioned the vote based on low turnout. Well, chairman Mendelson, that turnout kept you on the ticket. Others who doubt the vote's validity have argued that majority minority wards of the city did not understand what they were voting for. I find this argument abhorrently racist and I hope you do as well. I believe that struggling but strong, intelligent, and tight-knit communities saw their needs and voted for a more equitable system. Let us do what is right, let us respect their wishes.

To you council members, I say this: Put politics aside. I know there is a lot of talk of compromise. I do not think you should compromise. You should enact Initiative 77, as passed by voters, immediately.

Thank you.