

Monday, 9/17/2018

Room 500

Bill 22-913, Tipped Wage Workers Fairness Amendment Act of 2018: Committee of the Whole  
Public Hearing

Chairperson Mendelson and members of the committee,

My name is Nathan Luecking, I am a Ward 6 resident and a school social worker at Anacostia High School. I am speaking today in support of initiative 77.

As a high school social worker in Ward 8, a big part of my job is to help students manage the difficult circumstances of poverty. The reality is, a great many of our Ward 8 families are reliant on single-parent income from low wage work. Many of these jobs fall under the category of "tipped wage" earnings.

While various barriers discourage our parents from working at the high-end restaurants uptown (transportation, distance, zip code and class discrimination), there are often jobs available in Ward 8 as hairdressers, nail technicians, parking lot attendants, and food delivery drivers, all of which are considered tipped wage work in DC.

I'm reminded of one parent in particular, whose daughters attend Anacostia High School. Her girls brag that she is the best hairdresser around, and all the young ladies want her expertise before the first day of school. Mom does well on tips when folks have money to spend, like back to school, or after tax refund season. However, for the rest of the year, she struggles to make predictable income, and some months she can't pay rent or utilities.

While Mom is dependent on tips from her customers, her employer gets paid regardless of whether her customers tip well or not. She would frequently be in disputes with her employers over what she was owed, versus what she was paid. Because of her tipped income, there was some gray area that her employers would exploit.

When Initiative 77 passed I was excited, finally higher, more predictable pay for our ward 8 families! Now mom would be able to bank on a steady income stream, and her employers would have a harder time denying her earnings.

I was also excited for Ward 8 residents who followed 77 closely and made their voice heard at the ballot box. Anacostia High School is a polling place, so I was able to chat with folks after they cast their vote. I remember talking to a grandma and her daughter who voted yes on initiative 77, and were hopeful that it would pass. They had been Ward 8 voters their entire life and grandma voted in every election since the 70's.

Clearly I was horrified to discover that City Council was moving to repeal the decision that my home Ward, and work Ward overwhelmingly voted in favor of. For City Council to reverse the will of the voters, assumes that Ward 1, Ward 4, Ward 5, Ward 6, Ward 7 and especially Ward 8 residents either voted for something they didn't understand, or naively voted against their interest. This is both condescending and anti-democratic. For anyone who thinks Ward 8 voters

are not paying attention to this issue, they are underestimating what happens when you play with a Ward 8 voter's money. If City Council repeals this law, it will be a dark day for the Council and one that voters won't soon forget.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

Nathan Luecking, LICSW