



WRITTEN COMMENT IN SUPPORT OF RESOLUTION 24-1697

Cook County Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

For 50 years, Women Employed has pursued equity for women in the workforce through policy change, expanding access to educational opportunities, and advocating for fair and inclusive workplaces so that all women, families, and communities can thrive. We're working to improve the economic status of working women in Illinois—including in Chicago and Cook County—and to close the wealth gap at the intersection of gender and race.

Women Employed supported the effort to eliminate the subminimum wage in Chicago, supports the effort at the state level, and is therefore in support of [Resolution 24-1697](#) to ensure a full and fair wage for tipped workers in Cook County and across Illinois.

Ending the subminimum wage for tipped workers is a necessary and overdue step towards economic fairness and justice for workers in Illinois. Due to occupational segregation, women—and especially Black and Latinx women—are more likely to work in occupations that force them to rely on tips for their income. They are some of the lowest-paid, lowest-opportunity occupations, and the women working in those jobs are at greater risk for sexual harassment, wage theft, unstable and unpredictable schedules, and many other injustices.

A few years ago, we worked with the City of Chicago, World Business Chicago, and the Civic Consulting Alliance to research the economic impacts of COVID-19 on women in Chicago. That research found that women make up 70% of the wait staff in Chicago, and that of all 746 occupations analyzed, wait staff had the lowest median annual earnings—just \$21,000 a year.

There is nowhere in the City or the County where \$21,000 is enough for a woman to support herself, much less her family. The fact is that the subminimum wage is a driver of poverty across the state, and it must end if we are to build an economically sustainable Illinois for ALL who work and live here.

Until we raise the floor in these jobs and end the subminimum wage so tipped workers are paid a full and fair minimum wage, with tips on top, we will not remove the systemic barriers holding women back, and we cannot close the gender and racial equity gaps facing Black and Latinx women in Cook County and Illinois.

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