



## 2019 POLICY PRIORITIES – LEGISLATIVE WRAP UP

JOTF advocates for legislative and budget proposals that improve the economic opportunities of Maryland's low-skill, low-income workers and their families. Our public policy advocacy efforts recognize that a healthy Maryland economy requires laws and policies that meet the workforce needs of employers *and* promotes fair and equitable access to economic opportunities for low-income Marylanders.

During the 2019 state legislative session, JOTF will support the following legislative and budget initiatives that promote access to education, training and employment advancement opportunities for low-wage, low-skill workers and job-seekers in Maryland:

### **Reduce Impact of Incarceration on Workers**

JOTF supported [SB238/HB13](#) to repeal the technical 'unit rule' prohibiting expungement of eligible non conviction charges within a unit of charges, and [SB833/HB977](#) (REDEEM Act) to comprehensively streamline existing expungement and shielding laws in a sensible, accessible way. This legislation included the automatic expungement of nonconvictions, clarification on the expungement eligibility of arrest warrants/invalidated warrants, and expanded access to expungement for misdemeanor and felony convictions after a 5- and 10-year waiting period, respectively. Both expungement bills were combined into one and expected to pass both Chambers. However, the House decided to reject technical amendments that were added to the bill once it was voted out of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee on the last day of the legislative session, which prevented a conference committee from being formed in time to secure a favorable vote.

### *The Criminalization of Poverty*

JOTF supported several bills aimed at dismantling the criminalization of poverty in Maryland. These bills were:

- [\(HB1267\)](#) Prohibit the suspension of a driver's license due to unpaid fees and allow for the statewide use of community-based alternative payments methods such as job skills training or adult education programs;
- Continue to defend the full implementation of the current Court of Appeals rule on pretrial detention and support additional funding to ensure that every jurisdiction has a robust pretrial services system;
- [\(HB566\)](#) Require the state or local jurisdictions to cover the costs of pretrial fees, including GPS monitoring, for indigent defendants being held in pretrial detention; and,
- [\(HB252\)](#) Require the state to establish a process to ensure that pretrial defendants are not denied access to voting.

JOTF was able to secure an additional \$800,000 in funding for pretrial, which was originally a request for \$1M that was cut during the Senate and House conference committee on the budget. However, the additional initiatives failed to secure a favorable vote in their respective committees. First, HB 252 passed strongly out of the House, however, due to compromises made by the sponsor, the bill was in a less than favorable posture and failed to receive a vote by the Senate committee before crossover. Second, HB 566 was negotiated heavily by both the sponsor and JOTF to secure a favorable vote by the House Judiciary committee. However, no legislation that addressed pretrial fines and fees were moved during this legislative session due to fiscal concerns. Finally, HB 1267 received an unfavorable vote in its respective committee, also due to fiscal concerns. However, shortly after Virginia's Governor dismantled the practice of suspending driver's licenses through their budget process, making Maryland the most punitive motor vehicle code of our neighbors.

### *Women's Pre-release Center*

JOTF supported several legislative initiatives to establish a pre-release center for women in Maryland. This included:

- [\(SB 419/HB715\)](#) To require the State to establish a stand-alone pre-release center for incarcerated women in Maryland and;
- [\(SB821/HB710\)](#) To facilitate programs that provide for the successful reintegration back into society

JOTF was able to secure, by amendment, a mandate for funding by 2020 through the passage of HB775 through the House. However, this bill received an unfavorable vote in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Simultaneously, SB 821 was amended to an interim study that will stipulate which programs that are currently provided to men's facilities can be provided for women pre-release facilities with existing funding. This passed both the House and Senate. This report will be released in October 2019.

### *Occupational Licensing -*

JOTF supported [\(HB 22\)](#), which would allow for a seven (7) year look back period into an applicant's background to ensure that erroneous, outdated, or irrelevant records are not considered in the obtaining of an occupational license. This measure passed both the House and the Senate and will become effective on Oct. 1, 2019.

## **Worker Supports and Benefits**

### *Earned Leave and Benefits*

JOTF supported several efforts to increase worker supports, income, and benefits, including:

- [\(HB166\)](#) *State Minimum Wage Increase*: JOTF will support the #FightFor15 coalition efforts to increase the state minimum wage to \$15/hour.
- *Defending Earned Sick and Leave*: JOTF will continue to aggressively defend, monitor, and provide oversight of the implementation of the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act.

- [\(SB500/HB341\)](#) *Paid Family Leave*: JOTF will support legislation seeking to expand the current paid family leave law to all workers – public and private – across the state of Maryland.

While the Fight for \$15 passed both the House and the Senate, the Governor quickly vetoed this legislation. Both Chambers overrode the Governor's veto the following week, which will allow for the phase in of a \$15 minimum wage in Maryland.

### *Auto Insurance*

During the 2019 legislative session, JOTF supported several efforts to provide for affordable automobile insurance and remove discriminatory factors from the rate process. These efforts included:

- [\(SB235/HB351\)](#) Eliminate the use of credit in determining automobile insurance premium rates
- [\(SB233/HB329\)](#) Eliminate the use of education and occupation in determining automobile insurance premium rates

HB 329 was amended to become a study, similar to the two-year study conducted by the state of New York before eliminating the practice of using education and occupation in their statute. However, the study received an unfavorable vote in the Senate Finance committee. No other legislation on these effort received a vote from its respective committee.

## **Reduce the Impact of Child Support Debt on Low-Wage Workers**

### *Child Support Low Income Obligor Workgroup*

During the 2019 legislative session, JOTF will supported [\(SB762/HB726\)](#), which consisted of legislative recommendations from the Child Support Working Group, such as the use of minimum orders for those who are unemployed and underemployed and provides for the non-establishment and suspension of orders due to criminal detainment or rehabilitative treatment. While this legislation received a favorable vote in the House Judiciary Committee, it did not receive a vote in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Unfortunately, the legislation's Senate sponsor was deployed to Afghanistan before the bill could pass over to the Senate, leaving the legislation without internal support.

## **Access to Education/Adult Education**

### *Eliminate Barriers to College Promise*

JOTF support [SB260](#), which changed the GPA eligibility and full-time work requirements following certificate or degree completion. This legislation successfully passed both the House and Senate as emergency legislation. Therefore, it will take effect immediately.

### *Diminution Credits -*

JOTF supported [\(HB294/SB621\)](#), which provided bonus diminution credits upon the completion of academic or vocational training. While this legislative initiative as able to secure a favorable vote from every member of the the Senate Judicial Proceedings committee, and passed the Senate unanimously, it was not brought up for a vote in the House Judiciary Committee.