

Local

# Bill would boost minimum wage for restaurant workers

---

By Caitlin Barbieri and Lia Tabackman | AP January 19

RICHMOND, Va. — The unstable nature of relying on tips to make a living is reflected in the paychecks of restaurant servers like Connor Rhodes, who has been serving Richmond’s restaurant goers for four years and says it’s not unusual for his paycheck to be zero dollars.

That’s because he earns \$2.13 an hour - a “subminimum wage” - which, after taxes, can result in an empty wallet if tips are weak and shifts are sparse.

“Depending on business, there’s no guarantee that we’ll get shifts that can pay the bills,” Rhodes said, explaining that servers typically have to save their wages from peak seasons to survive during the slower months.

But two state legislators have proposed a bill, HB 1259, that would do away with the “subminimum wage,” which is paid to workers like Rhodes who are exempt from receiving the federal minimum.

That \$2.13 an hour, along with tips, makes up the entire income of these workers. As long as the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 is met through tips received, employers are not required to pay their employees more than the subminimum.

If customers neglect to tip their server after their meal, it can end up costing the server money to have served the table at all.

“At the end of the night, the servers have to tip out the food runners, the bartenders and the bussers based on our food and alcohol sales. So say someone orders \$50 bottle of wine; I tip the bar 5 percent of that \$50. I need at least \$2.50 to break even from taking care of a customer, and sometimes the costs can go a lot higher. It’s rare that the

restaurant will compensate us,” Rhodes said.

According to a 2014 report by the Economic Policy Institute, the median hourly wage for U.S. restaurant workers, tips included, was \$10 an hour - compared with \$18 an hour for workers in all other industries. After accounting for demographic differences, the report said restaurant workers earned 17 percent less than similar workers in other industries.

Under HB 1259, servers and certain other employees who are exempt from the minimum wage would no longer have to rely on the generosity of others, through tips, in order to meet the minimum wage.

HB 1259 was introduced by Dels. Paul Krizek and Jennifer Boysko of Fairfax. Eight other Democrats are co-sponsoring the measure. The bill would also make it illegal for employers to pay laborers in certain service industries traditionally held by African-Americans - like shoe-shiners and doormen - less than minimum wage.

Krizek said the legislation would “put everybody on the same minimum-wage playing field.”

This story was produced by Virginia Commonwealth University’s Capital News Service.

Copyright 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

 **0 Comments**

---