



National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Maryland State Conference of Branches,
Youth Councils and College Chapters

PO Box 67747 Baltimore, Maryland 21215

TESTIMONY OF NAACP IN SUPPORT OF **HB 430, THE LIVING WAGE BILL** **February 20, 2007**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Elbridge James and I am here representing the Maryland State Conference of Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The NAACP strongly support HB 430, the call for a living wage or “livable” wage for employees of contractors doing business with the state government because without such protections these employees will continue to earn substandard/poverty compensation and lack of benefits. We take this stance because:

- A disproportionate number of workers stuck doing vital work (health care, food service, child care) in low-wage jobs are African-American and Hispanic;
- We consider living wages a civil right. What good does it do to guarantee equal access if African Americans, Latinos and other minorities are stuck at lower economic levels. As you know Dr. King was marching for living wages for sanitation workers in Memphis when he was assassinated. He considered the struggle for economic rights the next phase of the civil rights movement.
- We care about a child’s education, and this bill will provide affected parents with more time to support their children’s education rather than work 2 and 3 jobs to meet their family financial needs.
- We believe that this bill would benefit the minority business enterprise program because, for affected enterprises, it encourages them to hire and retain more qualified and stable employees. The whole purpose of the program was to eliminate cronyism and build a Black middle class. You don’t build that by just enriching a few owners. You build it by creating high-wage jobs. If an employee is stuck making \$6.15/hour working for a Black-owned janitorial firm, it’s not any comfort that he can tell his kids “Well, Junior, we can’t afford new shoes for you this year, but take comfort that my boss is a Brother.” That doesn’t fly. A good job is a good job and a lousy one is a lousy one, regardless of what your boss looks like.

In conclusion, we strongly urge you to pass this bill and provide equity for Maryland citizens now living in state sponsored poverty.