

BUILDING BACK BETTER

How the Raise the Wage Act Will Decrease
Worker Poverty and Increase Small Business
Success in the Maine Restaurant Industry

February 2021



1 | INTRODUCTION

Congress is currently considering the Raise the Wage Act, which would raise the minimum wage for all workers in the United States to \$15 an hour and phase out the subminimum wage for tipped workers. Although the state minimum wage is \$12.15 in Maine, tipped workers in the state are still subject to a subminimum wage of \$6.08 an hour. Tipped workers in Maine, who are disproportionately women and people of color, live in poverty and rely on food stamps at about twice the rate of all other workers in the state.¹ **Raising the wage to \$15 an hour by 2025 and phasing out the subminimum wage for tipped workers by 2026 would reduce Maine's poverty rate by more than half and lift thousands of workers and their families out of poverty, while also allowing restaurant employers to build back better.**

This report studies how restaurant workers in Maine would be impacted by the Raise the Wage Act. It also profiles small businesses who believe the Act is essential to restaurant industry recovery post-pandemic and provides data on how small business restaurants have been impacted by COVID-19, comparing Maine to states that have eliminated the subminimum wage for workers and examining the common argument from organizations such as the National Restaurant Association (NRA) that raising wages for workers leads to worse outcomes for small businesses.



In this report, we analyze data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics survey to understand Maine's median wages, determine the proportion of workers receiving a wage increase due to the Raise the Wage Act, and identify Maine's top occupations along with the median hourly wage for workers in these positions. All demographic information on Maine's workforce is obtained from IPUMS USA, which pools and harmonizes data from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) referenced in this report. Tipped workers' data was isolated to focus on customarily tipped positions such as barbers, hairdressers, parking attendants and is not exclusive to restaurant or food service tipped workers. In order to calculate the impact of the Raise the Wage Act on Maine's total poverty rate, we reference the 2019 federal poverty line, which is \$12,490 for a household of 1 and increases by \$4,420 for each additional household member. For a conservative estimate,

we calculated the number of currently employed workers in households of 1 whose total income is less than \$10,000 and the number of currently employed workers in households of 2 or more whose total income is less than \$15,000 to produce the total number of currently employed workers who have an income less than the federal poverty line.

We also examine new data published by Professor Raj Chetty of Harvard University, along with John N. Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, Michael Stepner, and the Opportunity Insights Team on how Maine's small businesses fared during the pandemic. The team analyzed open small businesses in several different sectors based on raw numbers that they obtained from Womply, "a company that aggregates data from several credit card processors to provide analytical insights to small businesses and other clients."² The Opportunity Insights Team analyzed the decline in

the number of open businesses for each of the several sectors in each state from January 2020 to January 2021. The data does not indicate whether the decline in open small businesses is temporary or permanent — it simply quantifies the number of open small businesses in a given time period. This report examines their data for Leisure and Hospitality businesses open during this period in Maine, and compares it to the same data for other states, particularly states that pay a full minimum wage for tipped workers with tips on top.

2 | **BACKGROUND: THE SUBMINIMUM WAGE FOR TIPPED WORKERS**

The subminimum wage for tipped workers, currently \$2.13 an hour, is a direct legacy of slavery.³ Prior to the pandemic, the subminimum wage for tipped workers forced a workforce that is nearly 70% women to live off the vagaries of customer tips, causing economic instability, racial inequity, and sexual harassment.⁴ With the pandemic, the subminimum wage became life-threatening. A majority of workers reported that tips declined more than 50%, and that they could not enforce social distancing and mask rules, as they were asked to do, on the same customers from whom they received tips. Worst of all, 41% of workers reported that sexual harassment went way up during the pandemic, and hundreds of women reported that male customers asked them to remove their masks to judge their looks and their tips on that basis.⁵



Seven states – CA, OR, WA, NV, MT, MN, AK – have rejected this legacy of slavery and require a full minimum wage with tips on top. Contrary to the messaging of the National Restaurant Association, these 7 states have had higher restaurant industry job growth rates and small business growth rates than the states with a subminimum wage of \$2.13 an hour for tipped workers.⁶ From 2011-2016, full-service restaurant employment grew by 20.4 percent in states with a full minimum wage with tips on top, but only grew by 16.37 percent during the same time period in states with a subminimum wage for tipped workers of \$2.13 an hour.⁷ States with subminimum wages higher than \$2.13 an hour, like Maine, generally did not have higher employment growth rates than the seven states that require a full minimum wage with tips on top. Similarly, restaurant establishment growth in these seven states has been equal or higher than the states with a subminimum wage for tipped workers. From 2011-2016, full-service restaurants in the seven states that require a full minimum wage with tips on top grew by 9.44 percent, compared to 8.8 percent in states that require tipped workers to be paid a subminimum wage.⁸

3 | IMPACT ON MAINE'S MINIMUM WAGE WORKERS, INCLUDING TIPPED WORKERS

In Maine, the minimum wage is \$12.15 for all workers, while the subminimum wage stands at only \$6.08 for tipped workers.^{9,10} Although the hourly median wage in Maine is \$19.66, over half of workers (56%) make far less.¹¹ Over a third of the total workforce (over 190,000 workers) earns an hourly median wage below \$15. Those who earn less than \$15 an hour work primarily in the service industry and are essential workers.¹² Workers earning under \$15 comprise 70% of all workers receiving food stamp benefits in Maine.¹³ The food service sector is one of the largest employers in Maine, and it provides some of the lowest wages in the state.¹⁴

TABLE 1 Top 10 Largest Occupations in Maine

JOB TITLE	Workforce	Median Hourly Wage
Retail Salesperson	20,330	\$12.27
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	16,960	\$12.66
Registered Nurses	14,490	\$33.14
Cashier	14,080	\$11.63
Fast Food and Counter Workers	13,530	\$11.54
Waiter and Waitresses	12,970	\$11.54
General and Operations Managers	11,960	\$39.90
Office Clerks, General	11,910	\$16.72
Customer Service Representatives	11,660	\$16.08
Janitors and Cleaners Except Maids and Housekeepers	11,450	\$14.21

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (May 2019). Occupational Employment Statistics - Maine. All Occupations and hourly median wage. https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_me.htm.

TABLE 2 Other Occupations Under \$15

JOB TITLE	Workforce	Median Hourly Wage
Nursing Assistants	9,020	\$14.59
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	4,180	\$12.41
Childcare Workers	2,760	\$12.89
Substitute Teachers	2,130	\$11.99
Host and Hostesses Restaurant, Lounge, and Coffee Shop	1,500	\$11.80
Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants and Bartender Helpers	650	\$11.69
Pharmacy Aides	80	\$13.98

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (May 2019). Occupational Employment Statistics - Maine. All Occupations and hourly median wage. https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_me.htm.

ESSENTIAL WORKERS
LACK A LIVABLE WAGE
TO FEED THEIR FAMILIES

Nearly a third of all workers who earn under \$15 an hour in Maine have at least one child. In Maine, a single adult with just one child will need \$31.67 hourly or about \$65,800 annually to cover minimal rent, food, transportation, and other basic living costs.¹⁵ However, 83% of Maine workers, who work predominantly in the food, health, and general service industry, still fall far below the livable wages necessary to provide for their families.¹⁶

TABLE 5 Tipped Workers Disproportionately Represent Vulnerable Populations

79%	Women Tipped Workers
5%	People of Color Tipped Workers
27%	Tipped Workers with Children
10%	Tipped Workers Using Food Stamps

Source: Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V10.0>

MAINE WORKERS WOULD THRIVE
WITH ONE FAIR WAGE

Currently, 10.9% of the total Maine population (1,344,212) lives in poverty.¹⁸ Using the federal poverty line,¹⁹ currently at least 77,626 Maine workers who are currently employed live under the poverty level.

All of these workers would be lifted out of poverty by raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for all workers, including tipped workers, reducing the poverty level in Maine to 5.13%, a 53% reduction in the state poverty level.

TABLE 3 Median Hourly Wages (Including Tips) in Maine

\$19.66	All Workers
\$13.18	All Workers Under \$15
\$12.33	All Tipped Workers

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 2019 Occupational Employment Statistics for Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations. Customarily tipped restaurant positions: Bartenders, Waiters and Waitresses, Dishwashers, Hosts and Hostesses, Restaurant, Lounge, and Coffee Shop, Cooks, Restaurant, Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants and Bartender Helpers. Other non-restaurant tipped positions: Barbers, Hairdressers, Hair Stylists, and Cosmetologists, Baggage Porters and Bellhops, Parking Attendants, Usher, Lobby Attendants, and Ticket Takers, Accessed 02/11/2021.

TABLE 4 All Workers with Children

36%	All Workers
28%	All Workers Under \$15
27%	All Tipped Workers

Source: Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V10.0>

TIPPED WORKERS
DISPROPORTIONATELY REPRESENT
VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The subminimum wage for tipped workers disproportionately impacts women and workers of color in Maine. Today, nearly 80% (79%) of tipped workers in Maine are women, and 5% are workers of color.¹⁷ Tipped workers use food stamps at nearly twice the rate of all other workers using food stamps in Maine.

TABLE 6 Amount of Workers Impacted by \$15 Minimum Wage

192,030	Workers Receiving Wage Increase ²⁰
32%	All Workers Receiving Wage Increase
77,626	Workers Lifted Out of Poverty
53%	Reduction in State Poverty Level

Source: Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V10.0>



EXACERBATED IMPACTS DURING COVID-19

Nationally, the pandemic has devastated the service sector, workers and employers alike. Prior to the pandemic, these workers had some of the lowest wages in the country. With the pandemic, these same workers have become essential even as their wages remain lower than the workers on average. This has created a dire situation for this workforce, who is disproportionately made up of women and people of color. In December 2020, One Fair Wage found that over 80% of workers experienced a decline in tips and nearly two-thirds (66%) report their tips have decreased by half or more. On top of that, 67% experienced a lower tip due to enforcing COVID-19 safety measures such as social distancing and requiring masks. Although these workers play a key role in maintaining pandemic safety and preventing spread they are more often punished with economic retaliation and sometimes sexualized harassment for their efforts to promote public health.²¹

4 | IMPACT ON EMPLOYERS

As described above, prior to the pandemic, the seven states that have required a full minimum wage with tips on top have had higher restaurant industry job growth rates and small business growth rates than the states with a subminimum wage of \$2.13 an hour for tipped workers.²²

With the pandemic, thousands of restaurants across the country have closed due to the pandemic and it is still unclear how many will be able to recover. These closures have had significant implications not only for the workers that rely on these businesses for income, but also the livelihoods of the owners of the establishments. However, contrary to arguments from the National Restaurant Association (NRA), increasing the wage of restaurant workers and tipped workers in particular has not accelerated business closures during the pandemic. For this report, we examined data collected from the Opportunity Insights team on the decline of open leisure and hospitality small businesses from January 2020 and January 2021 and found no significant differences between states that have eliminated the subminimum wage for tipped workers compared to states that maintain the subminimum wage.

TABLE 6

'Leisure & Hospitality' Business Decline,
January 2020–January 2021, Ordered by Rate

States with full
minimum wage for
tipped workers

27.7%	Idaho	47.4%	Colorado	52.4%	Indiana
35.6%	New Hampshire	47.7%	North Dakota	52.5%	Oregon
36.7%	Utah	47.8%	Kansas	53.5%	Texas
37.0%	Missouri	48.4%	Iowa	53.5%	Georgia
38.4%	Nebraska	48.7%	Nevada	53.6%	New Jersey
39.6%	Arkansas	49.5%	South Carolina	54.2%	Illinois
40.7%	Kentucky	49.8%	Minnesota	54.5%	Hawaii
41.7%	Tennessee	49.9%	Virginia	55.7%	New York
42.7%	Montana	50.1%	Florida	56.1%	Oklahoma
43.1%	Wyoming	50.4%	Maryland	57.5%	Louisiana
43.3%	North Carolina	50.5%	Arizona	57.6%	Alaska
43.6%	South Dakota	50.6%	Pennsylvania	57.8%	Massachusetts
43.9%	Alabama	50.7%	Ohio	58.1%	Connecticut
44.5%	Vermont	51.5%	Mississippi	61.2%	Rhode Island
45.8%	Washington	51.8%	Delaware	61.5%	New Mexico
46.4%	Wisconsin	52.1%	California	65.0%	Michigan
47.2%	West Virginia	52.3%	Maine	71.7%	District of Columbia

Source: Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, Michael Stepner, and the Opportunity Insights Team, Opportunity Insights Economic Tracker, Accessed February 2021

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 | **On the whole, paying tipped workers a full minimum wage with tips on top has not resulted in higher rates of hospitality business closures.** The mean business closure rate between January 2020 and January 2021 for the seven states that require a full minimum wage for tipped workers with tips on top (CA, OR, WA, NV, MT, MN, AK – all highlighted in Table 6) is 49.9%, and the mean business closure rate for the other 43 states that allow a subminimum wage for tipped workers is 49.4% – almost exactly the same.
- 2 | **With a subminimum wage for tipped workers, Maine's rate of decline in open leisure and hospitality businesses exceeds 5 out of 7 states that have a full minimum wage with tips on top.** In fact, the majority of One Fair Wage States (4 out of 7) have a business closure rate that is less than the median business closure rate for all states, and less than the majority of all states' business closure rates in the 'Hospitality and Leisure' sector. The seven states that require a full minimum wage for tipped workers thus not only have no greater rates of decline in open restaurants since COVID, but also have significantly lower rates of poverty, reliance on food stamps, and rates of sexual harassment among food service workers.²³ These out-

comes are both beneficial for workers and the businesses that employ them. Data in the table shows that in pairing these four states (highlighted in yellow below) with business closure rates of less than the median to states with comparable populations, rural/urban spread, and political dynamics, states with a subminimum wage have higher closure rates than comparable states with One Fair Wage – a full minimum wage with tips on top.

- 3 | **The five states with the highest business decline during the pandemic in the 'Leisure & Hospitality' sector are all states with a subminimum wage for tipped workers – see Table 8.**

TABLE 7

Comparisons of Similarly Situated States' Business Closure Rates

States with a business closure rate that is less than the median of all states are in orange.

One Fair Wage State	Business Decline	Subminimum Wage State	Business Decline
Montana	42.7%	West Virginia	47.2%
Nevada	48.7%	Arizona	50.5%
Minnesota	49.8%	Maine	52.3%
Washington	45.8%	Delaware	51.8%
California	52.1%	New York	55.7%

Source: Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, Michael Stepner, and the Opportunity Insights Team, Opportunity Insights Economic Tracker, Accessed February 2021

TABLE 8

States with Highest Business Closure Rates

	Subminimum Wage for Tipped Workers	Business Closure Rate
Michigan	\$3.67	65.0%
New Mexico	\$2.55	61.5%
Rhode Island	\$3.89	61.2%
Connecticut	\$6.38	58.1%
Massachusetts	\$5.55	57.8%

Source: Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, Michael Stepner, and the Opportunity Insights Team, Opportunity Insights Economic Tracker, Accessed February 2021



MAINE SMALL BUSINESS RESTAURANTS WHO WANT TO BUILD BACK BETTER

Many of Maine's employers already support the Raise the Wage Act, and especially phasing out the subminimum wage for tipped workers. These employers not only note that the subminimum wage places workers in a dire situation — higher rates of sexual harassment, poverty, and reliance on food stamps, but also believe that paying workers a livable wage is essential for restaurant recovery in Maine.

Michael Landgarten

Owner, Corner Pub Kittery and Lil's Cafe
Kittery, Maine

"I have owned and operated restaurants here in Maine for 35 years. Clearly the minimum wage is too low. No one working full time should also require federal assistance. The bigger affront is the sub-minimum wage. Working for tips, a legacy of slavery, keeps our industry backward looking and our workers mired in jobs that encourage harassment, racism, wage theft and poverty. One Fair Wage presents a tremendous opportunity to make a positive economic and social difference while at the same time lift up restaurants to become more professional workplaces where owners and workers thrive. It's time."

Steve Corman

Vena's Fizz House
Westbrook, Maine

"Making the perfect cocktail is an art. You don't become a master overnight but from years of practice. Our best bartenders have been with us for years. COVID has officially closed our bar to the public, but now they bottle our drinks and teach mixology classes on Zoom. Employees stick around because they feel valued. Instead of paying the subminimum wage, we pay one fair wage. That means that instead of worrying about making rent, our bartenders can focus on making the perfect cocktail."

Ilma Lopez

Co-owner, Chaval
Portland, Maine

"I grew up in my grandmother's kitchen in Venezuela and for the past twenty years I have worked in award-winning kitchens around the world. While I am now a restaurant owner, I still bake every day. That keeps me grounded and reminds me that valued, happy employees are the key ingredients to a successful restaurant. Our success depends on valuing everyone from the dishwasher to the sous chef to the servers and bartenders, and we need a wage structure that reflects that."

Dave Aceto

Co-owner, Arcadia National Bar
Portland, Maine

"Six years ago, I opened Maine's first arcade bar because I wanted to be able to share my joy for arcade games, cocktails, and beer and be able to have fun at work. You know what's not fun? Worrying about whether you'll be able to pay your rent or your electricity bill if you have a bad night of tips. That kind of dependence on customers' generosity for their survival opens up servers and bartenders to rampant sexual harassment and exposure to COVID. That's a lot less fun than video games and beer."

5 | CONCLUSION

A \$15 minimum wage for all workers and a full minimum wage for tipped workers allowed for small business growth prior to the pandemic, and has not led to a greater decline in small business restaurants during the pandemic, in the states that have enacted these policies compared to states with a subminimum wage for tipped workers like Maine. Restaurant owners and workers rely upon each other. Despite contentious debates that pit the interests of businesses against that of workers, data shows that restaurant owners and workers alike can thrive with a \$15 minimum wage with tips on top. The states that have eliminated the subminimum have had higher sales and small business growth despite common misperceptions, along with lower rates of poverty and sexual harassment.²⁴

There is an increasing momentum for the country to compensate essential service sector workers for the risks and sacrifices they are enduring. President Biden named a \$15 minimum wage

and full elimination of the subminimum wage for tipped workers to his campaign platform as a candidate, and now as a priority for his new Administration. Enacting One Fair Wage in Maine and nationwide has become a COVID-19 crisis concern, both for service workers and public health. These workers are essential to the businesses that have remained open since the pandemic and have been key to any degree of normalcy, from dining out to picking up groceries, experienced by the average person. If Maine wants to ensure both economic recovery and public health, we must ensure that these workers are paid the full minimum wage and can thus enforce safety protocols and reject dangerous and demeaning sexual harassment from customers — all while contributing to the ongoing success of Maine's small business restaurants by both working in them and also by having the ability to support them as consumers.



ENDNOTES

- 1 Calculation of workers employed in customarily tipped positions that receive food stamps and are at or below the poverty level. Retrieved from IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V10.0>.
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- 12 *Ibid.*
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