

Testimony of Yannet Lathrop

National Employment Law Project

Against HB 1749, HRJ 72, and HJR 102 Which Would Threaten the Democratic Process in Missouri

Hearing before the Missouri House Committee on Elections and Elected Officials

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My name is Yannet Lathrop. I am a senior researcher and policy analyst for the National Employment Law Project (NELP). Founded in 1969, NELP is a non-profit, non-partisan leading advocacy organization with the mission to build a just and inclusive economy where all workers have expansive rights and thrive in good jobs. We partner with federal, state, and local lawmakers on a wide range of workforce issues. We have worked with dozens of city councils and state legislatures across the country and with the U.S. Congress on measures to boost labor standards, including higher minimum wages, efficient enforcement, unemployment insurance modernization, and other policies that protect workers. Most relevant to today's hearing, we have also helped support numerous community-driven ballot initiatives that similarly improve labor standards for all workers.

NELP testifies in opposition to HB 1749, HRJ 72, and HJR 102. We are concerned that these bills would make the ballot initiative process more difficult in Missouri, and the overturning of the public's vote much easier. The ballot initiative process is at the core of direct democracy, and as such, it is one of the most important tools voters have to influence policymaking, particularly in the absence of progress by their elected representatives. The Missouri House of Representatives should be working to bolster voters' voice in policy matters, not stymie it.

NELP has witnessed the harm lawmakers can cause when overturning the will of voters or otherwise barring popular input into policymaking. For example, in the District of Columbia in 2018, voters approved a ballot initiative that would have gradually phased out the lower tipped wage in the city, only for the initiative to be repealed by the City Council¹—to the detriment of tipped workers, who already had to contend with higher levels of poverty and wage theft resulting from a lower cash wage². It took another attempt four years—and a pandemic—later for a similar initiative to not only win again at the ballot box, but also remain unharmed by lawmakers.³

Other attempts to thwart public input into policymaking take other shapes, such as when state governments preempt (block) local governments from improving upon state laws. Regardless of how they manifest, these are anti-democratic measures that harm voters of all political stripes and walks of life, and can create an unhealthy distrust of government.

NELP urges an unfavorable report on HB 1749, HRJ 72, and HJR 102. Thank you for your time.

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Endnotes

1. Ballotpedia, Washington, D.C., Initiative 77, Minimum Wage Increase for Tipped Workers (June 2018), accessed January 22, 2024, [https://ballotpedia.org/Washington,_D.C.,_Initiative_77,_Minimum_Wage_Increase_for_Tipped_Workers_\(June_2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Washington,_D.C.,_Initiative_77,_Minimum_Wage_Increase_for_Tipped_Workers_(June_2018)).
2. Sylvia Allegretto and David Cooper, *Twenty-Three Years and Still Waiting for Change: Why It's Time to Give Tipped Workers the Regular Minimum Wage*, Economic Policy Institute, July 10, 2014, <https://www.epi.org/publication/waiting-for-change-tipped-minimum-wage/>.
3. Ballotpedia, Washington, D.C., Initiative 82, Increase Minimum Wage for Tipped Employees Measure (2022), accessed January 22, 2024, [https://ballotpedia.org/Washington,_D.C.,_Initiative_82,_Increase_Minimum_Wage_for_Tipped_Employees_Measure_\(2022\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Washington,_D.C.,_Initiative_82,_Increase_Minimum_Wage_for_Tipped_Employees_Measure_(2022)).