

First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to all of the members of our council that stood in support of Tipped Workers in Washington, D.C. against Ballot Initiative 77. To: Chairman Phil Mendelson, Chair Pro Tempore Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie, At-Large Councilmember Anita Bonds, and Ward Members: Jack Evans, Brandon T. Todd, Trayon White, Sr. and Former Mayor and Chairman Vincent C. Gray-Thank you for listening to the Workers in the District! Thank you for understanding the ill effects that a bad bill could cause if it were passed into law. I am proud and grateful as a resident that as elected officials, you have the clear conscience to protect the income and livelihood of a significant portion of this city's labor force.

To All Members of the Council:

I would personally like to thank you all for listening to Tipped Workers in D.C. and all affiliated groups with regards to Ballot Initiative 77, now being considered as Bill B-22-0913. I am very much respectful of the burden you share for having to reconsider a bill that was voted on by the residents of the District. I am also conscientious of the awesome power bestowed upon you as a body, willfully, by the people to at times, rethink any law that has the potential to add undue burden or outright fail local residents or any group with the intent it was meant to protect or endorse better standards for. I hope that you will exercise your better judgment and do what is best for local workers and residents in the District of Columbia.

My name is Karim Soumah. I was born in D.C. and raised right outside of this city in neighboring Silver Spring. I have lived in Ward 2 going on 18 years and congruent with that time has been my tenure as member of our local service industry. Discounting my first job as a Barista at a local kiosk at the Union Station food court when I was 14, I started off bouncing around as a part-time waiter with "0" to an accrued "very little" amount of experience at a couple of small restaurants to supplement my then part-time job as a legal assistant, before I landed at more "established" and recognizable restaurants downtown where there was a higher volume of foot traffic and established dining crowds. Early on, I recognized that the corporate and stiff environment wasn't for me, but I persevered, because I needed the money. Plagued and encouraged by the hypocrisy of corporate agents; managers played favorites, exploited women, and denied minorities opportunities. If you didn't follow certain rituals like: getting drunk with the managers after work, you were outcast. Plain and simple. By 2008, our nation's economy crashed along with my time in the field of law. I had become a paralegal by then, but couldn't find a job that paid as well as what I had earned before the financial crisis. I didn't have a degree, so I plunged full time into the service industry, but this time, I decided to only work for smaller businesses with owners who had skin in the game and with whom I could have direct contact with if it pertained to anything serious that concerned me. I wanted to work in a safer environment where biases were only related to the effort that you put forth for the business. After my recent experiences, I was looking for a work environment that provided a meritocracy. Fortunately, I worked my way up to a wealth of opportunities through the experience I was able to garner over the years as this moment also happen to coincide with the rise of the small business owned concept restaurants that began sprouting all around the city. I have had the pleasure and have reaped the professional interests of being able to have an in

depth look at how our dynamic scene in D.C. began to flourish! I benefited and gained opportunity under the leadership of small business owners such as Jamie Leeds (Hank's), Paul Carlson (Vinoteca), Khalid and Diane Pitts (Cork Wine Bar and Market), and Ris Lacoste (Ris). All owners continue to hire diverse staffs (with 0 regard for race, gender, creed, or religious affiliation) and provide safe working environments that guarantee a competitive rate and chance for upward movement. They all are involved in their communities and are very mindful of their reputations. They are all very fearful of enforcement measures in D.C. and are respectful of our licensing laws and governance against wage theft and wage inequities. They fear and respect our system, because non-compliance has consequences and is bad for business. Since 2008, I have been able to afford to live in this city. It is not easy, but this industry has allowed me to keep up with the exorbitant costs. In my early days, I was either subjected or witnessed many things that are thankfully less prevalent now in this business. I'm glad to see small businesses swarm into this city and essentially force corporate giants to reconsider investing here. I appreciate how much more evolved we are as an industry anytime I travel. I had to gain a certain level of experience and respect for the business, but all in all, the service industry has been good to me in Washington, D.C.

Simply put: I was, and remain a DEFINITE NO on Initiative 77. It is a bad law that has very incomplete solutions to very complex problems and the organization that has pushed for "Yes" (Restaurant Opportunities Centers) did not take into account the voices and desires of actual tipped restaurant employees. The initiative was poorly written and basically said it was pushing for a minimum wage increase that was already taking effect. And who doesn't want minimum wage increased? Servers and bartenders are not the same tipped employees as those working in nail salons and fast food establishments like McDonald's-and yes, they do deserve a living wage. There should be a distinction made there without punishing restaurant workers. Workers in D.C. know that the damage done by this bill will be irreversible and will stunt the development of one of the fastest growing industries in this city. This is to eliminate the wage credit. This is to eliminate tips. Tips that help me afford a city that has an average rent of \$2,072-743 sq. feet. The median (59% of local residents is \$1, 501-743 sq. feet). To survive you must make triple the amount of your rent in salary. To survive in Washington, you need to make at least \$54, 036-before taxes, not the \$28, 800 40 hours a week at \$15 an hour promises you. That is a laughable solution to a system that already provides people with enough money to live and flourish in this area. I also do not appreciate the divisive rhetoric inspired by the MeTooMovement which has conflated this matter. Is there harassment in the restaurant industry? Hell, yes! There is certainly room for improvement. Some way to fix that would be to stop making women part of the "experience". My colleagues and I universally believe that you should let women and men servers and bartenders wear the same uniform, have equal opportunities for good shifts, and have the same opportunities for advancement. How NOT to protect women? Take away their income. The tacky and nasty politics distorted what could have been very constructive discourse. Instead, ROC spread straight lies to get their way. At any given time they were connecting NO on 77 to Trump, the NRA, racism, to sexual abuse and harassment. They have spent the entire summer telling people around D.C. that the councilmembers that support repeal are the puppets of powerful restaurant owners. ROC is now pushing the idea that only wealthy white people voted NO on 77, and people of color voted "Yes", and that overturn would be racial injustice. That is cynical, opportunistic, and an absolute lie. Again, no one asked restaurant people, who come in all colors and who have all said: NO. This is cheap, and we see it

used time and again (especially by the GOP). Do we really need more lying and misdirection in this town?? If you can't make your point on the merits without lies, then your point is not a good one.

In conclusion: Initiative 77 is a bad proposal that does not support workers in D.C. It should NEVER go into law. It does not "fix" anything and both sides are forecasting that implementing this as law will increase prices, and will make rent hard to pay in this city. This bill will hurt the very people ROC purports that it will protect. It will provide more problems than solutions the proponents are seeking and will create less desirable jobs. This is a hard matter to consider, but the Council MUST REPEAL Ballot initiative 77, because Local Workers have spoken and DO NOT want this.

Thank you kindly for taking the time read this. I appreciate you. Repeal this bill and the Workers in D.C. will appreciate you, more.

Regards,

Karim Soumah

Ward 2 Resident

Tipped Worker: Ris Restaurant –Ward 3

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