

May 21, 2019

Honorable Emeryville City Council Members,

We the undersigned are writing you to *strongly* urge your adoption of the resolution to amend the Minimum Wage Ordinance that would “pause” the minimum wage for small, independent food-service businesses at \$15/hr.

The Mills College survey reaffirms the pinch that many of us are feeling. We’re not being hyperbolic in saying that further large jumps in the minimum wage threaten our existence. This study documents how many of us have resorted to restricting employee hours, embracing models with fewer employees and large price increases. These price increases have had the unintended consequence of alienating some of our most price-sensitive customers which often include seniors and families.

We want to emphasize that our request for a pause is not an attempt to inflate our profits as some have insinuated. The wellbeing and continuity of our staff benefits us and we desire this as much as you do. We align with your desire to elevate people out of poverty but we hope you’ll agree this is a housing, healthcare and educational issue as much as a wage issue.

The food-service sector is widely known as one with very narrow profit-margins where labor represents a large percentage of our operational costs. This margin has been further eroded since the adoption of the MWO and in some cases has completely vanished. In addition to higher labor costs than our neighboring cities, we are dealing with persistent parking issues, auto-burglaries and a 'gig economy' that has eroded our profits through a delivery model.

Small business owners are among the hardest working people in the city. Many of us do our own marketing, accounting, human resources, etc. We often step into the kitchen or floor when an employee is out ill. Most of us have poured our life savings into our dream of owning our own business. Many of us live within the community that we serve or nearby and we suffer from the same high housing costs and cost of living in the bay area as our employees do.

We hope you’ll consider the importance of small businesses to our community when making your decision. We believe that our existence contributes to the vibrancy and character of the community that Emeryville should want to maintain and grow. Our presence improves public safety, walkability and contributes to community building by offering gathering spaces where neighbors meet and where they know us and our staff by name. Does Emeryville want franchises, delivery and counter service to dominate its food-service offerings? We hope not.

The adoption of this ordinance will be an affirmation of Emeryville’s commitment to small businesses in our community and we respectfully urge you to adopt the revised MWO at your May 21 meeting. For many of us, this pause and the possibility for further evaluation is a matter of survival for our businesses and the jobs of our employees.

Sincerely,

Wayne & Marilyn Boucher (The Broken Rack)
Jake Freed and Hiroko Nakamura (Shiba Ramen and The Periodic Table)
Peggy Kong (Polaris Cafe)
Taylor Kim (Public Bar)
Jonas Bernstein (Rotten City Pizza & Branch Line Bar)
Channarith Vanthin (Dee Spot Cafe)
Doug Smith (Rudy's Can't Fail Cafe)
Damon Stainbrook (Pig in a Pickle BBQ)
Andrew Cohen (Mr. Dewie's Cashew Creamery)
Catherine Bergen (C CASA)
Oranuch Chatsrinopakun (Summer Summer & Bureau 510)
David Sung (Hong Kong East Ocean Restaurant)
Jon Santer, Polly Hancock, and Dylan O'Brien (Prizefighter Bar)
Marcos Quezada (Patatas Neighborhood Kitchen)
Fernay McPherson (Minnie Bell's Soul Movement)
Alvin Shen (Best Coast Burritos)
Karen Truong (Jasmine Blossom Thai Cuisine)
Fabrizio Cercatore (Hot Italian Public Market)
Tea Tran (Monster Pho)
Jeffrey Kroeber (Townhouse Bar & Grill)
Lito Saldana (Los Moles Emeryville)
Susan Chae (Miyozen)
Erik Hansen (Moomies)
Connie Chen (Koja Kitchen)