



# Measuring the Fallout of Initiative 82

THE CONSEQUENCES OF TIP CREDIT  
ELIMINATION IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

# Executive Summary

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Initiative 82 was a ballot measure backed by One Fair Wage and opposed by local tipped restaurant workers. The measure passed at the ballot in 2022, and began scheduled wage hikes on May 1, 2023, followed by additional increases July 1, 2023 and July 1, 2024. While these increases are scheduled to continue until the District’s tip credit no longer exists, the city’s restaurants and employees are already struggling.

The first phases of implementing Initiative 82 have wreaked havoc on the District’s once-robust dining scene. Instead of One Fair Wage’s false promises of “tips on top” and worker equity, restaurants and their employees have already experienced job losses, restaurant downsizing and closures, increased use of service charges in lieu of traditional tips, and a disrupted customer-employee experience.

- D.C. full-service restaurants have lost as many as 4,000 jobs since implementation of Initiative 82. Seventy percent of restaurants have cut hours, laid off staff or stopped hiring.
- Survey data shows restaurants in the city are closing at a higher rate than any year since the pandemic.
- Employees report that they are worse off under Initiative 82, not better.
- A database compiled by DC residents shows the exponential rise of service charges in the District.
- Another survey shows that if these wage hikes continue as planned, restaurants will continue layoffs, raising prices, adding service charges, and close down or leave the city for neighboring Maryland and Virginia.
- This on-the-ground evidence concurs with a larger national picture: Tip credit elimination tried elsewhere across the country has cut jobs and tips and shuttered restaurants.
- Recently, progressive voters in Massachusetts—led by that state’s Democratic governor—rejected tip credit elimination by two-to-one.

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# Federal Jobs Data

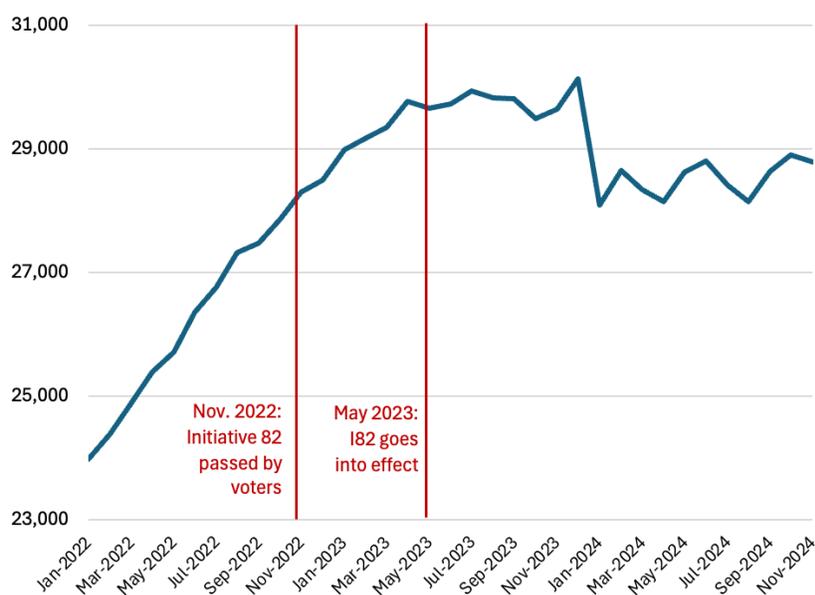
Surveys find the District’s full-service job losses could top 4,000 since the start of Initiative 82 in May 2023.<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows to date, D.C. still hasn’t recovered them.<sup>2</sup>

Initiative 82’s elimination of the tip credit primarily targets full-service restaurants and bars, as the industry employs most of the workers who earn the base tipped minimum wage plus tips.

In a year since Initiative 82 was implemented on May 1, 2023, EPI analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data found D.C. lost roughly 1,000 net jobs (-3.5% loss) in full-service restaurants.<sup>3</sup> This net figure is likely a conservative estimate of job losses: it measures the net change in full-service restaurant employment from May 2023 to May 2024. It does not include job turnover, shift reductions, or stalled hiring because of Initiative 82.

As of September 2024, a Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington survey found this number could top 4,000 job losses.

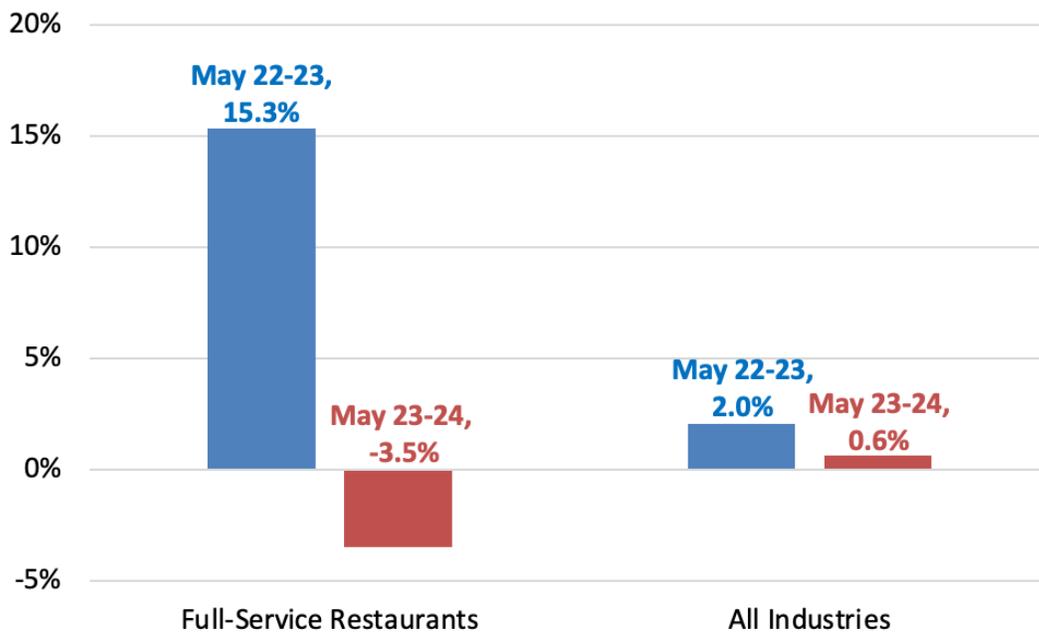
**D.C. Full-Service Restaurant Employment, Jan 2022-Present**



\*Note: This trend continues to hold despite some seasonal hiring fluctuations, through the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics data release in December 2024.

Not only did D.C. lose full-service restaurant jobs as a result of implementation of Initiative 82 beginning May 2023, this loss was during a period of general gain for the city’s total private employment (+0.6% total job gains). The District’s full-service restaurant job losses were a stark decline from the prior year: from May 2022 to May 2023, full-service restaurant jobs grew over 15% (+3,943 jobs).<sup>4</sup>

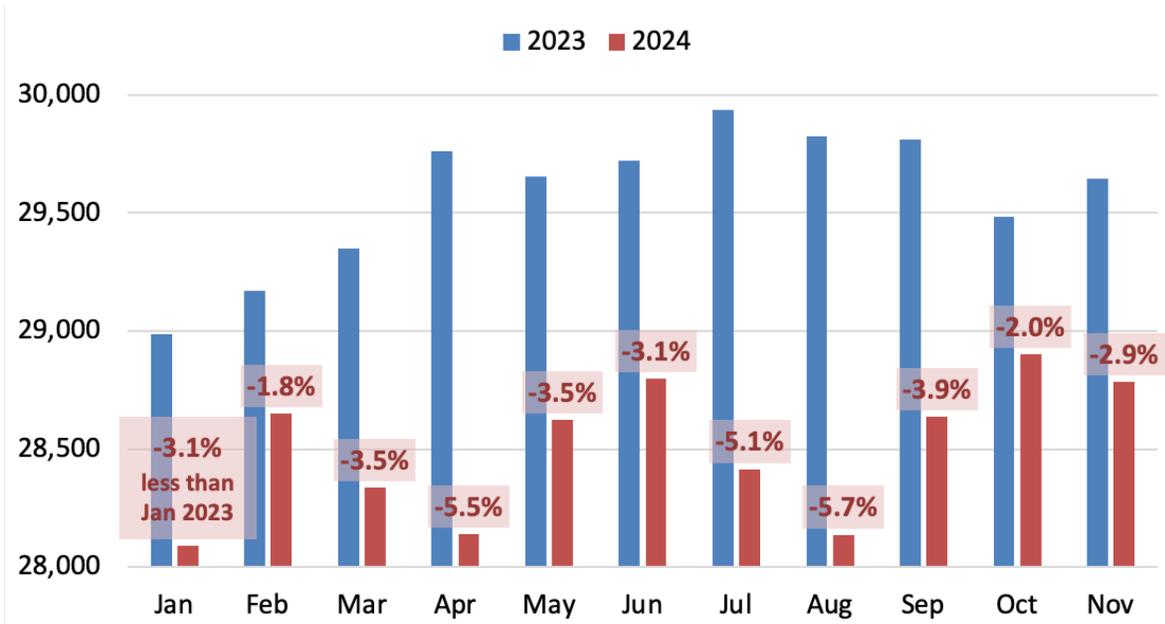
**Year-Over-Year D.C. Employment, 2022-23 to 2023-24**



This year has been bleak. The latest survey by the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington (RAMW) finds full-service restaurant jobs have been down 2% or more every month of 2024 compared to last year:

- 70% of restaurants have cut hours, laid off staff, or stopped hiring to reduce costs.
- Full-service jobs are declining 2% to 6% monthly while quick-service grows.
- DC restaurants face double the sales decline of suburban locations (16% vs. 8%).
- A record 64 restaurants have closed to date in 2024.

## Comparing DC Full-Service Restaurant Jobs by Month in 2023 and 2024



# Survey Data

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A new survey by the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington found not only are tipped employees losing jobs, but restaurants are reducing hours, experiencing rapid sales decline, and closing at record rates.

The Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington (RAMW) surveyed over 150 full-service restaurant operators local to the District in fall 2024, finding the negative impacts of Initiative 82 reached far and wide across the industry.<sup>5</sup>

**Lost Jobs:** RAMW’s findings concur with federal data that Initiative 82 is causing outright job losses.

- 70% have reduced staffing overall;
- 30% have laid off key support staff including bussers, food runners, hosts, and others; and
- 24% have laid off servers.

**Reduced hours:** RAMW adds context to what the net job loss data leaves out – even for those who keep their restaurant jobs in D.C., many have had their scheduled hours slashed. This even extends to kitchen and support staff, who are not tipped employees or paid using a tip credit:

- 91% have cut servers’ hours;
- 88% have cut kitchen staff hours; and
- 88% have cut support staff hours.

**Restaurant closures:** RAMW finds 81% of restaurants had reduced profit margins from pre-pandemic levels, and 75% report less foot traffic in their restaurants compared to last year, resulting in a two-year high of 64 restaurant closures in the District.

# Employee Feedback

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## ON TIPPING AND EARNINGS:

D.C. servers and bartenders are reporting lower tips and less take-home pay under Initiative 82.

“Since the rise of service charges, customers in D.C. are tipping less, and tipped workers like me are feeling it.”<sup>6</sup>

“A lot of people don’t tip these days.”<sup>7</sup>

“A year ago, [IHOP server Nick Jones] would walk out of a shift with \$120 to \$160 a night — but now it’s more like \$80 to \$110.”<sup>8</sup>

“Tipped workers are seeing less tips in their pockets. Because those service charges are not always going to them.”<sup>9</sup>

“People see that 20% service charge and they’re just going to say ‘Oh, [the tip is] already included.’”<sup>10</sup>

“Most people are saying their overall hourly wage is going down from what they made before a service charge.”<sup>11</sup>

## ON LAYOFFS AND RESTAURANT CLOSURES

Restaurants have closed in D.C. at the highest rate in 2024 compared to years prior to Initiative 82, with lower-than-average restaurant openings compared to previous years.<sup>12 13</sup> Unprecedented close-to-open rates leave tipped restaurant employees fewer job opportunities in the city.

“Current government policies have created an impossible operating environment”<sup>14</sup>

“Not enough business to cover expenses”<sup>15</sup>

“We have concluded that it is no longer economically sustainable to continue to operate in the current location”<sup>16</sup>

“Unfortunately the neighborhood has changed and nobody is coming out”<sup>17</sup>

“We have decided the [business] is no longer sustainable for us...”<sup>18</sup>

“Look at D.C. as a cautionary tale – people have lost their jobs...”<sup>19</sup>

“[They’ve] regulated positions like busser, and runner, and food expeditor out of existence...”<sup>20</sup>

“In 2018 we could very proudly say that in the District of Columbia, that the bar and restaurant industry was 96% independently owned and operated. We can no longer say that now...”<sup>21</sup>

## ON THE FORMER TIP CREDIT SYSTEM

“The tips [are] the main reason why we got into this industry.”<sup>22</sup>

“You’re talking to a Black bartender, and I’m telling you this is what works for me, and it has always worked for me...”<sup>23</sup>

# Other D.C. Consequences

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Service charges spread rapidly in the District following the start of Initiative 82 – with nearly 300 local restaurants using them to adjust to the new mandate.

Initiative 82 proponent One Fair Wage acknowledged that tip credit elimination is an unsustainable model for restaurants and historically promoted the implementation of service charges as a way to get more restaurants to adopt anti-tip credit policies.<sup>24</sup> (Now, One Fair Wage has rapidly reversed its position, rejecting the use of service charges as “corporate greed” following their widespread unpopularity.<sup>25</sup>)

An Employment Policies Institute survey prior to the implementation of Initiative 82 found 70% of restaurants were planning to introduce service charges at their locations to adjust to rising wage bills.<sup>26</sup>

Sure enough, service charges appeared in D.C. A local Reddit thread compiled reports of service fees in the city’s restaurants and to date nearly 300 implement some sort of automatic fee on customer checks.<sup>27</sup>

## WHAT IS A SERVICE CHARGE?

- Service charges, sometimes called “service fees,” are any additional charges added to restaurant customers’ bills as a percentage of the check denoted specifically for service costs.
- Service charges are not the same as tips or gratuities. Managers or owners are not allowed to keep any tips. Many states have their own laws also protecting tips for employees on top of federal protections.

# National Consequences & Research

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The consequences of Initiative 82 are not unique to D.C. – economists have documented the same detrimental effects of tip credit elimination across the country.

## JOB LOSSES

- A review of two decades of U.S. Census Bureau data by Dr. David Neumark and Maysen Yen, University of California-Irvine, finds every \$1 increase in the tipped minimum wage causes up to 6.1% employment loss for tipped restaurant workers.<sup>28</sup>
- Another analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by Drs. Bill Even and David Macpherson finds tipped servers and bartenders make up 18 percent less of full-service restaurant jobs in states with slashed tip credits, compared to states that maintain a robust tip credit. Even and Macpherson similarly find tipped workers make up 19 percent less of scheduled hours in full-service restaurants in states with slashed tip credits.<sup>29</sup>
- A Harvard Business School study of Yelp restaurant listings found every \$1 increase in the minimum wage in San Francisco (which applies to tipped restaurant workers) increases the likelihood of restaurant closure by 14 percent.<sup>30</sup>

## TIPPING DECLINES

- A study by Professor Michael Lynn, Cornell University, found that as tipped minimum wages are raised, the percentage left as a tip by customers falls in full-service restaurants.<sup>31</sup>
- Analysis by Maggie Jones, a researcher at the U.S. Census Bureau found increasing tipped minimum wages by 5-6 percent results in a proportional decrease in restaurant workers' tip income and overall worker earnings.<sup>32</sup>
- Data by Toast point-of-sale platform finds that states that have eliminated tip credits have the lowest average tipping percentages in the country, such as California, Washington, and Nevada.<sup>33</sup>
- As a result of employment and tipping declines due to tip credit elimination and wage hikes, Dr. David Neumark and Maysen Yen, University of California-Irvine, find every \$1 increase in the tipped minimum wage causes a 5.6% loss in earnings for tipped restaurant workers.<sup>34</sup>

Tipped employees across the country overwhelmingly support the tip credit system and oppose One Fair Wage's attempts to eliminate it.

A national survey of thousands of tipped restaurant employees found 90% prefer the tip credit system over a higher flat wage where tips are compromised. Furthermore, 87% believe eliminating tip credits would reduce their earnings.<sup>35</sup>

Dr. Lloyd Corder, adjunct professor at Carnegie Mellon University and founder of CorCom, Inc. which conducted the survey, described the "crystal clear" findings.<sup>36</sup>

**“It’s rare to find an issue that commands such widespread support across diverse age, race, gender and geographic groups.”**

**-DR. LLOYD CORDER**

For these reasons, One Fair Wage has been unsuccessful in exporting tip credit elimination in states and cities across the country, largely due to local employee opposition.

## INVOLVEMENT IN THE DISTRICT

- One Fair Wage’s predecessor Restaurant Opportunities Center backed the campaign to bring tip credit elimination to D.C. in 2018 through Initiative 77.<sup>37</sup>
- While voters approved Initiative 77 at the ballot, actual restaurant workers mobilized against the proposal, resulting in a historic 16-hour hearing before the D.C. City Council, who then voted to reverse the measure.<sup>38 39 40 41</sup>
- Not taking no for an answer, One Fair Wage campaigned again in D.C. beginning in 2021 after the devastation of COVID-19 to eliminate the tip credit.<sup>42 43 44 45 46</sup>
- Following the passage of Initiative 82 on the 2022 ballot, the local One Fair Wage organizer accused One Fair Wage of leaving restaurants in the dust for a new campaign in Chicago following the 2022 election, calling it a “sham and a fraud” and a “turn and burn” group that isn’t “actually from DC.”<sup>47 48</sup>

## FAILURES TO EXPORT D.C. CONSEQUENCES ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN 2024

- One Fair Wage called the District of Columbia its cornerstone campaign to eliminating tip credits in 25 states by 2026.<sup>49</sup>
- In the years following Initiative 82, One Fair Wage has failed to get tip credit elimination enacted in all but one of its target states and cities – which have been bolstered by local restaurant worker opposition. In 2024, One Fair Wage legislation or initiatives failed in Arizona, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio, New York, and Rhode Island following overwhelming local employee pushback.<sup>50</sup>
- Even in Chicago, One Fair Wage’s only successful tip credit elimination campaign since D.C.’s Initiative 82, the city is already feeling negative consequences of the law after just a few months since it went into effect.
  - The city has shed thousands of hospitality jobs since the law began eliminating the tip credit in July 2024.<sup>51</sup>

- The presence of service charges on customer checks doubled in 2024 compared to years past, according to the *Chicago Sun-Times*.<sup>52</sup>
- The city has experienced a “rash of restaurants closing,” according to *Eater Chicago*.<sup>53</sup>

## RECENT PRO-TIP CREDIT CAMPAIGNS LED BY RESTAURANT WORKERS

- In the city of Portland, ME, a group of tipped restaurant workers led the opposition to defeat Question D, a ballot measure that would have raised the local minimum wage to \$18 per hour and eliminated the city’s tip credit.<sup>54</sup> Despite high-profile celebrity endorsements in favor of tip credit elimination, voters in Portland struck down the proposal by a nearly twenty-point margin.<sup>55 56 57 58</sup>
- In Massachusetts, a One Fair Wage-backed tip credit elimination ballot measure failed by a near 2-to-1 margin at the ballot in November 2024, following a robust opposition effort from local restaurants and employees.<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup>The measure even received opposition from Democratic Governor Maura Healey, who cited her own previous career as a tipped restaurant server.<sup>61</sup>
- In Maryland, repeated statewide and local campaigns by One Fair Wage in Maryland have been rejected<sup>62</sup>, most recently following a state Senate Finance Committee hearing received testimony from dozens of local employees and restaurant operators in opposition to eliminating the tip credit.<sup>63 64</sup>

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