

S.B. 387
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
January session 2013 January 31 2013
Testimony by Rev. Laurel E. Scott
Senior Pastor, North United Methodist Church, Manchester, CT

Good afternoon. My name is Laurel Scott. I am a Christian minister serving the congregation of North United Methodist Church in Manchester, Connecticut for the past four years. Before becoming an ordained minister, I worked as a policy analyst and special projects director for the City of New York Department of Social Services and for the Community College system as a job skills and college prep. Program Director. I worked with and on behalf of the poorest of citizens, people who either made minimum wage or received public assistance. Because I was in direct contact with this population, I developed a strong compassion for the people who make the minimum wage in our society. This is not a living wage, it is merely a minimum wage.

When a person makes \$8.25 an hour in our state, which is among the top five states in the nation in terms of the cost of living, they are not able to meet basic living expenses. If the person is single and fortunate enough to share expenses with others, he or she might be able to make it on \$330/week. But when that same \$330/week is to be shared with a family of three – let's say a single parent with two children or a couple with one child, there is no way that that paycheck can stretch to cover all necessities. With a minimum of \$750 reserved for rent, \$350 for transportation and \$300 for food, that's all there is. Nothing left for incidentals, nothing for medications, nothing for clothing, nothing for utilities, not to speak of books and tuition if there is a college student in the mix.

The people who make minimum wage are those who keep our bathrooms, offices, hospitals, airports, train stations clean, who bus tables and serve our meals in restaurants, who wash our vehicles, who work on the front line of security in our buildings, who bring our food to market and table. They are students working their way through college and sadly, they are men and women of prime working age who struggle on a daily basis to put food on their own families' tables while in some cases serving food to those whose tax cuts make \$25,000 available for spending, while those serving make just over \$17,000 per year.

This is basic math. As the CPI continues to rise, we need also to raise the minimum wage. If we do not, the working poor become poorer even as they continue to work. As the Dow Jones Industrial Average rises and the wealthy among us see increases in the value of their stocks, we need to raise the minimum wage for those at the bottom who help make it possible for those at the top to increase their wealth. At \$8.25 an hour these hard-working citizens will never become wealthy. All we are doing is helping them to survive with a little bit of dignity.

I have not even spoken of our moral obligation to maintain a civil society by taking care of those least able to take care of themselves. I chair the board of one of our non-profits here in Connecticut. Over the past five years, our food pantry has been patronized by more and more

of the working poor as is our thrift shop where patrons find items of clothing for \$5 or less. We need to reduce the number of our citizens using food pantries and thrift shops. If we do not increase the minimum wage to \$9:00 as proposed in SB 387 then the non-profits that run programs like ours will find themselves being more overburdened with requests for food, clothing and help with shelter and utilities. We have an obligation to help others who share a community, a neighborhood, a state, a nation, with us. One of the ways in which we can do this is to increase the minimum wage as proposed, with periodic increases linked to the CPI.