

## **Connecticut Communist Party USA**

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**Labor and Public Employees Committee  
Testimony, Tuesday, February 18, 2014  
Joelle Fishman, Connecticut Communist Party USA**

This testimony is in support of raising the minimum wage for all workers, and in support of HB 5071 regarding wage theft.

Raising the minimum wage is good sense for low wage workers, tipped workers, and the entire economy. Connecticut has done well by placing ourselves among the growing number of states that have already raised the minimum wage above the national level. But it is far from enough to provide a living wage for any workers, and especially for tipped workers who were excluded from the last minimum wage increase.

The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 now before Congress, supported by the White House, raises the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 and 70% for tipped workers with both tied to inflation.

The restaurant lobby has vehemently opposed any raise for tipped workers. The alarms they have set forth that this would result in big price increases for the consumer have not held up where tipped workers have been included in raises. In ten states the tipped worker minimum wage is at or near 100% of the minimum wage including California, Washington and Nevada.

It is time to "take money out of politics" and out of the decision making process. When low wage workers and tipped workers are paid better they can better care for their families and put more back into the economy. This benefits not only this majority female workforce, it benefits everyone.

It is wonderful that our Governor supports the federally proposed \$10.10 minimum wage. It is essential that 70% for tipped workers tied to the cost of living be included in our state legislation.

Even \$10.10 and 70% is far from what it takes to live on. In Connecticut, the sustainable wage required to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment is \$23.58 an hour or more depending on the city. (*Partnership for Strong Communities*). Given that perspective, a \$10.10 minimum wage with 70% for tipped workers should not be controversial.

We also urge passage of HB 5071 to address the rising incidence of wage theft in our state, in which employers violate labor standards and fail to pay legally required wages to workers, primarily low wage and often immigrant workers. After having performed work without proper compensation, and even after going through all the necessary legal procedures to rectify the situation, risking their job, workers often do not recover all wages owed for work performed.

HB 5071 would provide an incentive to employers to abide by the law by allowing workers who have not been paid according to labor standards "to recover twice the full amount of damages associated with an employer's failure to pay wages." No worker should be put into the position of fearing or finding that the work they perform is not be compensated.

Thank you for your time and attention on these two matters which will improve the lives of thousands of workers and their families, and boost the economy in our state.