

Dear Members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

I am a South Asian-American resident of Connecticut, where I was born and have lived my entire life. I am a nonpartisan state employee, serving as Legislative Analyst of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC). I am also a social justice activist representing the Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance (CIRA), a statewide grassroots coalition working to improve the lives of immigrant communities.

As an engaged citizen, I write in strong support of SB-32: An Act Concerning Working Families' Wages. I wish to illuminate the benefits of this policy as they impact Asian Pacific Americans (APA), a growing yet overlooked population in Connecticut.

An increase in minimum wage will significantly benefit many APA families and individuals in Connecticut. While 2012 US Census data indicates that Connecticut APAs enjoy a median income exceeding \$90,000, this figure does not reflect the vast disparities among our diverse APA groups.

In Connecticut, 6.2% of APA families and 8.4% of APAs age 18 and over live in poverty. Single APA mothers endure poverty rates of 12-13%. We cannot allow *any* community in a state with such wealth as ours to suffer like this. Connecticut policymakers and other stakeholders must work to drive down poverty and help families rise above the line. SB-32 signifies a critical step in a positive direction. As the costs of food, housing, and clothing increase, we must enable families' to provide these essential needs.

Furthermore, while many APAs in Connecticut own lucrative businesses or hold high positions in the private sector, a great deal work our most labor-intensive, least-paying jobs. Restaurant employees represent a particularly vulnerable sector of our workforce. As last year's legislative session granted Connecticut workers a minimum wage increase, the legislation froze many restaurant service employees' wages at \$5.69 per hour. According to the Bureau of Labor statistics, individuals working at these wages hardly take home \$20,000; which falls below poverty levels for a family of three in Connecticut.

Additionally, wage theft practices such as late clock-ins, early clock-outs, paying the service rate to workers engaged in other duties, and other exploits, further diminish restaurant employees' compensation. Immigrants and minorities, including APAs, most often occupy the low-wage, high turnover positions, which are most subject to mistreatment. Affording restaurant service employees the benefit of higher wages signifies a step towards justice for hard working individuals, as well as a more sustainable food industry.

As an increase in minimum wage will serve a great and necessary benefit to all Connecticut workers, including immigrant, APA, and colored communities of various backgrounds, I respectfully submit my support for a SB32. I thank you all for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alok Bhatt