

February 18, 2014

**To the Co-Chairs and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:**

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 32 An Act Increasing the Fair Minimum Wage**

*Submitted by Jay Kamins – Co-Owner Pixel and Light Design*

As someone who has spent time working for others – both good and bad, I know what it's like to be on both sides of the coin of an employer/employee relationship. Because of that, I know that one of the truly harmful things an employer can do to a worker is not paying the people who drive your business is a fair and decent wage.

For that reason, I told myself that if I ever became a business owner, one thing that I would absolutely be sure of is that my employees would be paid no less than what it takes to support themselves on a fulltime salary. It's virtually impossible for adult men and women to take care of their own needs – never mind a family – on today's minimum wage.

The sad thing is, although most small business owners like myself overwhelmingly agree, the big budget, big box corporations who employ the bulk of all low-wage workers can't seem to get it. Maybe that's why they spend boatloads of money lobbying against the well of hardworking men and women here in Connecticut, in every state across the nation and in Washington. This total disregard for humanity and the common good has drawn Congress to a screeching halt. Big money from special interest has convinced D.C. that tons of money in the pockets of a few – CEO's and shareholders of the Walmarts, McDonald's and Targets of the world – is more important than basic needs of the hundreds of thousands of men and women that they employ.

That's why I am supporting HB 5069. I am proud of this committee and proud to live in a state that's willing to take on economic inequality head on, and work to fight against employers who pay to impoverish. HB 5069 sends the right message to large chain employers who care more about the bottom line than the people they employ. It tells them that game is over: no more paying people subpar wages and then expecting the state to pick-up the remainder of the bill through government programs and aid. I for one completely support having a well-funded federal and state-based safety net to protect our most vulnerable men and women in times of need; however, I do not and will not ever support a corporate shell game that continually hides fair wages from workers and leaves both our government with empty walnuts.

No company should ever openly create a wage system that suggests to its fulltime workers to apply for supplemental benefits to cover their basic needs, yet we know that for sometime that this has been the Walmart model that has been fervently adopted by others. Thankfully, HB 5069 addresses that and when passed will show big box and large chain low-wage employers that it's not okay to cheat workers out of fair pay.

HB 5069 coupled with SB 32 to not only raise the minimum wage but to also hold corporate wage thieves accountable for the fair pay of the people that they employ is a strong step that this legislature is taking to right our state's economic wrongs. I'm asking for each of the members of this committee to please think of your friends, family, neighbors and constituents and their children and loved ones when voting on these bills; think of the holidays, birthdays and first days of school that so many of Connecticut's low wage workers have to struggle through. Think of the mom working as a cashier at Walmart who can't afford her own gallon of milk after checking dozens of them out for customers each day. Think of the dad

who lost work as a construction worker during the last recession, working the grill at Chili's, but unable to afford to take his family out for a meal there. Think of these very real stories when these bills come up for a vote and then think of me asking you to please support both SB 32 and HB 5069.

Thank you.