

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 Rondelynn Bell – Co-Owner/Founder, NiRo Designer Center

Thank you for raising the issue of increasing our state's minimum wage and allowing me to speak in support of it today.

As a small business owner, day after day we receive calls from business groups, chambers, associations and alliances working to gain our favor to support their efforts to help to grow and strengthen the presence and capabilities of homegrown entrepreneurs in our state. Many of these measures are taken up here at the state capitol and proposed as legislation. Many of them I can agree with, some I do not.

That's why it's a wonder to me that over the past two years that my business partner and I have been active in the fight to raise the minimum wage for Connecticut's lowest paid workers, that I have not received a call from any of these groups offering up their favor or support for an issue that is not only good for workers but good for business as well.

During the time that we've advocated for a higher minimum wage, we've seen Connecticut highlighted both in national and local news for the continually growing economic equality gap. From The Courant to Businessweek, Forbes to CNN, Bloomberg, NewsJunkie and more there is no shortage of reports detailing just how unequal Connecticut's economy is. With town after town and resident after resident falling further into poverty which each new report published and with our state being the second most economically unequal of the contiguous U.S., one would think that the small business community – the engine that keeps our local economy going, – would have stepped in by now to take a stand and help dig our state and it's people out of distress. Instead, many in the business community have done the exact opposite, not only turning their backs on their family and neighbors who are working for low-pay, but coming out against supporting to raise their wages.

There's no excuse for this. The math is simple: when hardworking men and women make more money, they spend more money, right here at home. Low wage workers very rarely have the time or opportunity to spend their money on extravagant vacations or even business trips but they do spend money at businesses like mine and at local entertainment venues and grocery stores. Some of these are the very same businesses that have come out against supporting a higher minimum wage – it just does not make any sense. Our state, in recent years has taken the right steps to remedy these problems.

Since 2012, my partner and I have held a press conference along with state legislators supporting the minimum wage for workers at our shop, incorporated the issue into a women's community conversation that we host there as well and spoken in support just about every where we've gone and to anyone who would listen. And on the last day of 2013, I joined Governor Malloy, Lieutenant Governor Wyman and legislative leaders from both the House and the Senate to welcome in the first day of better pay low-wage workers. At that time, many in the room were able to acknowledge that that first increase was a much-needed step of many in the right direction. I'm proud to know that the Governor and members of this body are prepared to take one of those next steps now.

Please support SB 32 and raising the minimum wage. It's the right thing to do.