



Testimony to the Labor Committee

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Common Cause in Connecticut

Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and distinguished members of the Labor Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. Common Cause in Connecticut has a strong history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics **and we have a sincere interest in insuring that all of Connecticut's residents have an opportunity to provide for themselves and their families.** We have more than half a million members nationwide and 7,500 members and activists in Connecticut.

I want to commend the Committee for addressing these critical issues for families in our state. We have choices about how we treat people in our state. Choices about how we build our economy and how we support the people of this state.

I am here in support of the following bills:

SB 858 AAC Employees Who Customarily and Regularly Receive Gratuities and the Minimum Fair Wage

RB 6791 AAC Workers' Wages at Large Corporations

HB 6877 AAC A Minimum Work Week for Persons Performing Janitorial Duties

HB 6932 AAC Paid Family and Medical Leave

HB 6933 AAC Predictable Scheduling for Employees

In addition, we support two bills that address extreme difficulties and discrimination faced by residents of our state – immigrant workers and people with criminal convictions seeking employment. The numbers of both of these populations are increasing in our state and across the country and these individuals deserve the opportunity for employment.

Committee Bill 106 AAC Retaliation Against Immigrant Workers

HB 6875 AAC Criminal Records and Employment Applications

Most of Americans working today, 75 million of them, get paid by the hourⁱ. Many of these are low wage workers, who cannot get enough hours to make ends meet, or have to work too many hours to see their children at the end of the day. Subsisting at the poverty level while working hard at a job or two, or more, makes for a precarious and stressful life. Something is very wrong when individuals are willing to work hard only to have to rely on government assistance for food, health care, or housing in order to make ends meet. Poverty, such as low wage workers face, is a particular strain on families. More than 25% of low wage workers in America are parents, and a majority are the only wage earners in the family.ⁱⁱ Low wage workers often have little or no control over their schedules, which may vary widely from week to week, or even day to day. Trying to arrange child care when you do not know when you will be working becomes an enormous challenge, in addition to pay for school supplies, field trips, or activities on a budget that already makes you choose between rent and heat. In addition, many large employers provide workers with only limited hours alleviating the need to pay benefits and exacerbating the problem of the already low hourly wage.

Women represent 71% of restaurant service workers in an industry that pays some of the lowest wages in the nation, with little access to benefits. The Connecticut minimum wage for restaurant servers is \$5.69. The reason put forth for the lower wage for tipped wait staff is that wait staff will make up the gap in tips, the so-called "tip credit". Nationally, food servers rely on government assistance for food at nearly twice the rate of the rest of the population.ⁱⁱⁱ The persistence in this intentional inequality is not accidental. According to filings with the Connecticut Office of State Ethics, the Connecticut Restaurant Association intends to spend \$60,000 on lobbying this year^{iv} in order, among other things, to protect the ability of restaurants to pay certain employees far less than even the minimum wage. The National Restaurant Association spent \$2.2 million lobbying Congress in 2013. ^vCommon Cause in Connecticut supports eliminating the tip credit so that employees can reliably earn a fair wage. .

In addition to low wages, many low wage, hourly workers do not qualify for paid leave in case of extended illness, new baby, or ill family member. While Connecticut did pass a Paid Sick Leave law in 2011, it only applies to those business with over 50 employees, and the time off is limited to a few days per year - accrual is at a rate of one hour of paid sick leave for each 40 hours worked by a service worker up to a maximum of 40 hours per year.^{vi} Providing paid leave to recover from an illness, to care for a new baby, or to care for a sick family member would ease the burden on low wage parents who cannot afford to take unpaid leave. These workers would be able to rely on receiving continued wages rather than increasing their reliance on government assistance during times of illness or a new baby.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, Connecticut is tied with New York in having the largest gap between the top 1% earners and the average of the bottom 99%^{vii}. Leading the nation in income inequality is a disgrace. Raising the minimum wage, ensuring fair hours and schedules, and ensuring paid family leave are things that Connecticut can address in order to help decrease the enormous gap between rich and the rest of us. The people who clean our offices, care for our children, our parents and serve our food deserve more than a minimum life. I urge you to pass the bills noted above.

ⁱ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/08/who-makes-minimum-wage>

ⁱⁱ <http://15now.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Binder1.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://rocunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ROC_GenderInequity_F1-1.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.oseapps.ct.gov/NewLobbyist/security/loginhome.aspx>

^v http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/National_Restaurant_Association

^{vi} <http://www.jacksonlewis.com/media/pnc/2/media.1712.pdf>

^{vii} <http://www.epi.org/publication/income-inequality-by-state-1917-to-2012/>