



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 long 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 thank the Committee for addressing these critical issues that families in our state face. 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 39 AAC Minimum Fair Wage and Employees Who Customarily and Regularly Receive Gratuities

HB 5237 AAC Fair Chance Employment

HB 5370 AA Increasing a Minimum Fair Wage

HB 5371 AAC A Minimum Workweek for Persons Performing Building Maintenance Services

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. The time has come for **HB 5370 AA Raising the Minimum Fair Wage**. It is an incremental increase in the current hourly wage of \$9.60 to \$15.00 that is still barely enough to live on in our state but it is a step to more economic stability. It is time to move the hundreds of thousands of people working for minimum wage in our state out of poverty. No one who works full time should live in poverty.

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.^v Common Cause in Connecticut supports **SB 39 AAC Minimum Fair Wage and the Employees who Customarily and Regularly Receive Gratuities**. This bill proposes eliminating the tip credit so that employees can reliably earn a fair wage.

We are pleased that the numbers of incarcerated people in the state of Connecticut are declining. But, as of March 1, 2016 there are 15,691 people locked up in the eight facilities in the state. That breaks down to 5203 White, 6403 Black, 3944 Hispanic, 48 Native American and 93 Asian individuals.^{vi} Many of these individuals will be released planning to reenter society – reunite with family, find housing and become employed. None of this will be easy but finding employment, which is necessary for securing housing and for becoming a fully involved partner and parent, is critical. We fully support **HB 5237 AAC Fair Chance Employment** as one step to easing the challenges of obtaining employment. It is no guarantee of work but it will help jobseekers with felony convictions – the 1 in 3 adults with a record. HB 5237 will assist them to get over that first hurdle and get an interview. We believe that having a second chance is imperative and something that we as a society are obligated to insure.

Finally, we support **HB 5371 AAC Minimum Work Week for Persons Performing Building Maintenance Services**. We support efforts to insure that part-time workers with limited income have the opportunity for full time-work. Part-time workers are much more likely to have high turnover, be forced to take multiple part-time jobs, have difficulty obtaining and affording health care and other essentials for themselves and their families. Workers in this situation are much more likely to have to rely on state supports for essential services, an additional burden for the state and ultimately the taxpayers regardless of how profitable the employer is.

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 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.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/PDF/MonthlyStat/Stat201603.pdf>

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