

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW**

**Director, Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement**

**Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.**

**In support of raised *Senate Bill 39 An Act Concerning the Minimum Fair Wage and Employees who Customarily and Regularly Receive Gratuities***

Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and honorable members of the Labor Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of proposed Senate Bill 39 *An Act Concerning the Minimum Fair Wage and Employees who Customarily and Regularly Receive Gratuities*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 64,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 17 health centers across the state. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care and information they need, including the full range of reproductive health services.

As advocates for reproductive freedom we must consider all aspects of a woman's life including those that affect her economic stability. Every person deserves the right to a livable wage to care for themselves and their family with dignity. The subminimum wage structure violates one's human right to an adequate standard of living and for decades has perpetuated an unjust system of wage earning for tipped restaurant workers. The vast majority of tipped workers are women, many of whom are mothers providing for their families. Women's greater economic insecurity in the industry is largely attributable to their greater likelihood of being employed as tipped workers.<sup>i</sup>

There is a devastating impact of sub minimum wages which leaves many tipped workers relying on food stamps and other social welfare programs in order to survive. It means other basic human rights are denied to tipped workers including access to healthcare. Despite the success of the Affordable Care Act, for many tipped workers health care is still far outside their reach because the cost is too heavy a burden to put on themselves and their families. We know first, through patients we see in our health centers, the juggling act people have to play each month to pay their bills and meet their basic needs. The inability for people to pay for insurance, means depriving the most vulnerable residents' access to health care and critical programs that help reduce inequity and disparities in health care and health care access.

The two-tiered system of minimum wage is a form of legal discrimination that is perpetuating the gender wage gap and harming families because a significant portion of tipped workers are adults who are supporting families. The economic inequality experienced by workers in the restaurant industry hits women and people of color the hardest. Women make-up two-thirds of tipped restaurant workers in the country and 73% of these workers living in poverty are women. The economic impact of subminimum wages is dramatic for these employees and their families. The poverty rate for waiters and waitresses—who comprise the bulk of all tipped employees—is 250 percent higher than that of the workforce as a whole.<sup>ii</sup>

What is more alarming is that workers in states that have \$2.13 sub-minimum wage reported higher rates of sexual harassment and the restaurant industry continues to support and grow a culture of violence and harassment for their tipped workers.<sup>iii</sup> When women have to rely on their tips to barely survive that means being subjected to institutionalized sexual harassment where their managers and guests have financial power and control over them and their bodies. This exacerbates the culture of violence against women in our country, leaving women in the industry virtually silenced because their economic wellbeing is dependent on it. This legislation will be one step further in the right direction to address the culture of sexual violence and harassment in our state.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England believes that every individual has the right to determine their own reproductive destiny and understand that right is directly linked to the conditions in their communities. The threat of harassment and violence whether it in the workplace, in one's home or in one's community is a threat to their reproductive freedom. We believe every individual deserves the right to live in safe and healthy environments and to control their bodies, their gender and their sexuality—free from harassment and exploitation.

We must continue to move forward and update laws and policies to ensure a more equitable and just society. While we have made great progress in our state to provide workers with access to paid sick days and increase in the minimum wage, we must work together to do more to protect all workers including tipped workers. We urge you to support Senate Bill 39 *An Act Concerning the Minimum Fair Wage and Employees who Customarily and Regularly Receive Gratuities* to protect the basic rights of Connecticut workers by guaranteeing and promoting the health and economic security of all Connecticut citizens and allow families to thrive instead of barely survive.

---

<sup>i</sup> The Glass Floor: Sexual Harassment in the restaurant industry: [http://forwardtogether.org/assets/docs/The-Glass-Floor\\_Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Restaurant-Industry.pdf](http://forwardtogether.org/assets/docs/The-Glass-Floor_Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Restaurant-Industry.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Working Below the Line: How the Subminimum Wage for Tipped Restaurant Workers Violates International Human Rights Standards: [http://food.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/WorkingBelowTheLine\\_F2.pdf](http://food.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/WorkingBelowTheLine_F2.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> [http://forwardtogether.org/assets/docs/The-Glass-Floor\\_Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Restaurant-Industry.pdf](http://forwardtogether.org/assets/docs/The-Glass-Floor_Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Restaurant-Industry.pdf)