



Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association

433 South Main St., Suite 309 · West Hartford, CT 06110 · 860.216.6439 · Fax 860.216.4098 · www.ctwine.com

Jonathan Edwards

Testimony before the Labor and Public Employees Committee

In Opposition to SB 2, HB 5004, HB 7191

Good afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Senator Osten, Representative Hall, and distinguished members of the Labor Committee. My name is Jonathan Edwards, and I am the owner of Jonathan Edwards Winery in Stonington.

I am writing today in my capacity as President of the Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association (CVWA). We are a private, non-profit association of 24 vineyards and wineries across the state. Together our farms comprise over 1,500 acres of open space and our businesses host over half a million visitors per year. We are an important part of not only Connecticut's beautiful landscape but also its local economy.

On behalf of CVWA, I urge you to oppose SB 2 AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE; HB 5004 AN ACT TO INCREASE THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE; HB 7191 AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE. While we support the ethics behind this type of legislation, the bills in their current forms would be detrimental to employers across the state.

Recently a number of surveys ranked Connecticut as one of the costliest places to do business in the country—and we *already* have one of the highest minimum wage rates in the nation at \$10.10 per hour. Our weak economic climate is having negative repercussions on businesses' ability to grow here and retain the number of employees they currently have. The state needs to be focusing on legislation that will strengthen our economy. Further increasing the minimum fair wage—especially in such a short proposed timeframe—seems to negate (what should be) our goal: healing.

Despite the adverse impact this legislation will have on businesses in Connecticut, it appears the committee is likely to move these bills forward. Given that likelihood, I offer the following suggested revisions to help shape this legislation into a workable program and minimize some of the adverse impact to employers:

1. Expansion to 6 years

A three-year to four-year phase-in is unfeasible. We believe at least six years is necessary to implement the proposed increase. We simply cannot afford otherwise.

2. Training Wage

As the minimum wage has risen, employers have reduced the number of younger or low-skilled workers they hire—particularly those that have been unsuccessful in a previous work experience. Further, state regulations limit the applicability of the training wage to the first 200 hours of employment at a learner's, beginner's, or teenager's first job. Under current regulation, an employer can only pay this training wage at the individual's first job, regardless of whether that first job experience lasted a full 200 hours. The training wage provisions of this statute should be expanded in order to provide more opportunities for learners, beginners and teenagers, not eliminated. Given the importance of first work experiences, we should be doing what we can to encourage businesses to hire younger workers so that they can obtain the skills needed for more skilled positions later in their careers.

3. No CPI

The minimum wage increases have far exceeded inflation over the last 25 years or so, and going to \$15 will likely be at least double the CPI seen in comparison over the same decade going from \$10.15 to \$15—almost doubling in Connecticut. Inflation over the last decade has been 0-2% per year, roughly a 20% cumulative rate, while many states are seeing close to 40% min. wage increases over the same period. The data is clear as to why CPI should be removed from the bill.

In conclusion, we support any legislation that works towards making Connecticut a better place to work, live and run a business in. We urge you to consider our suggestions and the ramifications that the current proposals would have on businesses across the state.

Thank you for your consideration.