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Labor and Public Employees Committee
Testimony, Thursday, March 7, 2019
Supporting SB 2, HB 5004, SB 764
Joelle Fishman, Connecticut Communist Party USA

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and members of the Labor Committee,

I would like to begin by appreciating your leadership with the minimum wage bills you introduced.

It is time that policy decisions start from the point of view of those affected. In this case, the 510,000 low wage workers in Connecticut, the communities where they live, and all communities. Raising the minimum wage and increasing purchasing power is a boost to the entire economy.

The future of Connecticut requires that we address the shameful and unsustainable inequality in our state. It is an outrage to expect low wage workers to subsidize corporate profits.

Before discussing the details, I would like to share three stories.

Charlie Delgado, from New Haven, is a 22 year old graduate of Southern Connecticut State University. He has a debt of \$50,000 for student loans. He is a parking lot attendant at the hospital for \$10.10 an hour. He can't save, he can't pay back the loan, and if he didn't live with his mother he would be homeless.

He sends this message: "The Dream - to work hard, get your education, do your part - is not delivering what was promised."

Another graduate from SCSU is 26 and lives in West Haven. She works at a daycare center and makes just over the minimum wage. She finds out her hours on a week by week basis. She also has no choice but to live with her parents and hope for something better in the future.

The third story is of a 55 year old mother of six, a constituent of Rep. Porter, who was a teacher in her home country. Here, she became a home care assistant for minimum wage. Now she works at a child care center still making less than \$15 an hour. She and her husband, who also has a job, struggle on a daily basis to make ends meet.

Similar stories can be repeated in most any Connecticut town. It is a story felt disproportionately in communities of color and by women who make up a majority of low wage workers.

Connecticut led the nation in 2014 when we raised the minimum wage to \$10.10, phased in over three years. But we quickly fell behind as other states went further and as the cost of living continued to climb while wages did not.

So raising the minimum wage is really not a choice, it is an urgent necessity. But what are the details?

The Labor Committee bills apply an annual adjustment for inflation based on the Consumer Price Index. We support that.

Going further, the federal Raise the Wage Act of 2019 (HR 582 and S 150), co-sponsored by the entire Connecticut Congressional delegation, would raise the minimum wage to \$15 (by 2024) and then index the minimum wage to *median wages* which rise faster than inflation over time. Perhaps this should be considered here.

The Raise the Wage Act would also phase out sub-minimum wages for teens and tipped workers. That is a good idea. Perhaps in Connecticut the time has come to phase out the "training wage."

We should also note that if the federal minimum wage had kept pace with the increase in productivity over the last fifty years it would be over \$20 an hour today (Source: EPI). This is closer to what a Connecticut family needs for basics.

We also support SB 764 to limit "on-call" scheduling imposed primarily on low wage workers. It is not possible to take an extra needed job, plan for childcare, or take care of other necessities without knowing definite work hours in advance.

SB 2, HB 5004 and SB 764 are urgent steps to address the extreme inequality in our state. They are essential to raise us all up together.

References:

Economic Policy Institute: Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2024 would lift pay for nearly 40 million workers (includes CT stats)
<https://www.epi.org/publication/raising-the-federal-minimum-wage-to-15-by-2024-would-lift-pay-for-nearly-40-million-workers/>

Raise the Wage Act 2019 HR 582 and S 150
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/582?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Raise+the+Wage+Act+2019%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=4>