



Connecticut

Holding Power Accountable

Testimony to the Labor and Public Employees Committee

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Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director
Common Cause in Connecticut

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Senator Miner, Representative Polletta and distinguished members of the Labor Committee. My name is Cheri Quickmire. 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. We have 1.1 million members nationwide and more than 12,000 members and activists in Connecticut. 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.

I am here to testify in favor of the following bills:

S.B. No. 2 AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE and
H.B. No. 5004 AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE.

I want to start by saying that I am very happy that the committee is taking up this issue. There are many reasons to support raising the minimum wage which have been detailed in testimony before this committee. Primary among them is being able to take care of basic human needs like housing, health care, child care. We are falling behind in Connecticut on supporting families as they deal with these critically important challenges.

There are many myths about who would benefit by raising the wage. To dispel some of the long-held myths I offer the following information from the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington D.C. based nonprofit:

The workers who would receive a pay increase are overwhelmingly adult workers, most of whom work full time in regular jobs, often to support a family.

- The average age of affected workers is 35 years old. A larger share of workers ages 55 and older would receive a raise (14.6 percent) than teens (9.3 percent). More

than half of all affected workers are prime-age workers between the ages of 25 and 54.

- Although men make up a larger share of the overall U.S. workforce, the majority of workers who would be affected by a raise to the minimum wage (57.9 percent) are women.
- The minimum wage increase would disproportionately raise wages for people of color—for example, black workers make up 11.8 percent of the workforce but 16.9 percent of affected workers. This disproportionate impact means large shares of black and Hispanic workers would be affected: 38.1 percent of black workers and 33.4 percent of Hispanic workers would get a raise.
- Of workers who would receive a raise, 60.0 percent work full time, 44.0 percent have some college experience, and more than a quarter (28.3 percent) have children.
- Nearly four out of every 10 single parents who work (38.9 percent) would receive higher pay, including 43.0 percent of working single mothers. In all, 5.4 million single parents would benefit, accounting for 13.5 percent of those who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$15 by 2024.¹

I worked for many years with families who were very low-income, some with no income and many who were homeless. Some of these people were employed, some searching for work but I have experience understanding the challenges for people trying to balance life with very low wages. I don't think that balance is even possible when decisions need to be made about whether or not to pay rent, pay the light bill or purchase medication or pay for a child's school trip or put food on the table. But working for \$10.10 an hour if one has the good fortune to work 37.5 hours per week results in \$378.75 and \$1515.00 per week before taxes. It is doubtful that these jobs offer benefits even if the individual works full-time hours. But most minimum wage workers do not have the opportunity to work full time so they are in a position to work multiple jobs if they can find them. 14 other states in the country have higher minimum wages that Connecticut do. As a state with little affordable or available housing we need to catch up.

I appreciate the thought that has gone into developing a plan for increasing the wage over a number of years with the ultimate wage effective January 20 1, 2022 of not less than fifteen dollars per hour. A monthly wage of \$2,250.00 is certainly better than the current minimum wage but by 2022 it is unlikely to be a wage that can sustain a family. This is certainly not a recipe for addressing the needs of individuals and families who are barely scraping by on a daily basis – one paycheck away from a disaster.

Raising the minimum wage does not come anywhere near to bringing low income people to self-sustainability. Certainly it doesn't lift people out of poverty. Connecticut has a remarkable income inequality challenge that must be addressed as we consider how

we attract and retain people in the state. When we look at the various communities in our state and recognize that the median income is remarkably varied \$43,137 in Bridgeport and \$67,430 in Danbury. And the median household income of a Westport resident is \$151,771 a year. The US average is \$53,482 a year.

I appreciate that this committee is leading on addressing these critical issues. Many Connecticut residents are very grateful that you are standing up for them.

ⁱ Cooper, David, "*Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2024 would lift pay for nearly 40 million workers*", Economic Policy Institute, (February 5, 2019)