



Testimony of Arvia Walker, MSW
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In support of *Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 5004 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage*
March 7, 2019

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Arvia Walker, Public Policy & Strategic Engagement Specialist at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of *Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 5004 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 60,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 16 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 quality, affordable health care as a basic human right. Planned Parenthood has allied with other social justice partners in the "Fight for \$15" campaign here in our state, and have made the commitment to increase the minimum wage for our employees.

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. Women and mothers are important economic contributors to their families' economic security and their state's economy. We know firsthand, 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.

Raising the minimum wage would have the greatest impact on women.ⁱ Minimum wage workers are predominantly women and women of color, who continue to shoulder primary caregiving responsibilities in their families and raising the minimum wage is important to help close racial pay gaps. They deserve the financial support and peace of mind a livable wage will provide. While African American and Hispanic workers make up 26% of the state workforce, almost one-third (33.1%) of them would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage. More than 37% of African American and Hispanic women would directly benefit.

According to the Alliance for a Just Society and additional research performed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a single adult in Connecticut's must earn \$19.03 per hour to afford necessities without the aid of public assistance. In 2014, about half or more of minimum wage workers in every state were women—and in 22 states, women accounted for more than six in ten minimum wage workers. More than half (53 percent) of Black workers and 60 percent of Latinx workers in our country make less than \$15 per hour.ⁱⁱ In 2014, Latinas and African American women suffered the greatest losses in earnings because of the gender wage gap. Hispanic and African American women working full time and year round earned just 55 cents and 60 cents respectively, for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men. What we know is that the gender wage gap is significant and an increase in the minimum wage will improve the economic wellbeing of women and families in our state.

We also would like to express concerns about HB 7191, the Governor's proposal to raise the minimum wage. It more than doubles the impact of the subminimum wage training period for new hires and for workers under the age of 18. It increases the training period from 200 hours to 90 calendar days and reduces the subminimum wage rate from 85% of the full minimum wage to 75%. Under this bill, full-time workers could lose almost more than \$1,900 during the training period than as provided in current statute. Someone earning minimum wage simply cannot afford that loss.

The expanded subminimum training wage benefits fast food and retail chains with high-turnover staffing models and incentivizes more employers to fire workers as they “age out” of the training wage. Without providing additional funding to staff the Department of Labor’s enforcement actions, there will undoubtedly be widespread employer abuse.

We don’t have different health and safety standards for new or younger workers. Workers’ compensation statutes don’t have different standards for new or younger workers. The law doesn’t allow employers to discriminate against new or younger workers. We shouldn’t allow employers to pay new or younger workers a lower minimum wage.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England has long fought for a woman’s right to control her reproductive destiny which includes planning her family and raising her family in safe, healthy and sustainable environments. Increasing the minimum wage will have a positive impact on women’s health, their families and their economic security.

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 in the past, we can do more to improve the lives of CT workers by increasing the minimum wage to \$15/hour in our state. We urge you to support *Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 5004 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage* and ask you to amend HB 7191 to remove the expanded subminimum training wage 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. Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2015/04/30/112123/infographic-raising-the-minimum-wage-would-have-the-greatest-impact-on-working-women/>

² The Fight for \$15 is Winning for Women and Families <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-fight-for-15-is-winning-for-women-and-families/>