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Sent: Thursday, March 07, 2019 8:45 AM
To: LABTestimony
Subject: testimony in support of SB 2 and HB 5004

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Member of the State Committee for Connecticut Working Families Party

Labor & Public Employees Committee
March 7, 2019

SB 2 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage
HB 5004 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage

Good afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Janée Woods Weber and I live in West Hartford. I am a member of the State Committee for Connecticut Working Families Party, representing the First Congressional District. I am here to testify in favor of SB 2 An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage and HB 5004 An Act Raising the Minimum Fair Wage.

I support SB 2 and HB 5004 because they will gradually increase the minimum wage to \$15 by 2022 and then index it to inflation. I know firsthand why this increase is deeply needed by the most vulnerable families in our communities.

As a young child, I watched my mother, a single mother, work as a cashier in a corner store, earning a minimum wage salary of a little over \$3 per hour. She worked hard and tried her best to budget but her minimum wage earnings were never enough to cover our basic living expenses, even with the assistance of food stamps and Section 8 housing. I remember, a couple times a month, watching her reach into her purse and slowly fold out each dollar, carefully smoothing it flat and counting under her breathe. I never saw her count past \$17 and usually the amount was much lower. I always saw the worry in her eyes. There were no savings, no bank account to dip into if one of us got sick and needed medicine or some other inconvenience or stroke of bad luck happened. \$17, which is \$39 dollars in today's money, however hard earned, is never enough to take care of the basic needs of a family.

Just like when I was a child and minimum wage was inadequate, today's working families cannot afford to live on the current minimum wage, which is \$10.10 per hour. Connecticut's living wage, the cost of maintaining a basic standard of living, is \$19.08 for a single adult. It's \$40.48/hour for a single parent with two children, like my mother.

I'm not here today just to tug on your heartstrings. I'm here to testify to facts that make raising the minimum wage not only the moral and just action to take, but also the sensible and economically sound approach to ensuring our state's fiscal wellbeing and continued growth.

In the first year of a phased-in increase, full time workers could earn up to \$3,000 more. That's enough to make a tangible improvement in the life an early childhood worker, janitor, healthcare worker, or a cashier like my mother. Raising the minimum wage will begin to reverse decades of growing economic inequality and simultaneously create new levels of consumer demand.

In addition to giving working families the value of their hard work, raising the minimum wage is a step toward closing the racial pay gap. The minimum wage disproportionately impacts workers of color, who are overrepresented in low-wage jobs that do not offer fair wages. Black and Latinx workers are 26% of the state workforce and almost one-third would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage.

Women are also disproportionately employed in jobs with unfairly low wages. Because of these racial and gender gaps, more than 37% of Black and Latinx women would directly benefit from an increase in the minimum wage.

Raising wages benefits our society and helps people be more self sufficient. Workers who earn more spend more disposable income in the local economy, supporting businesses and paying more in sales tax. Workers who earn more are less reliant on safety net services, such as childcare subsidies, SNAP, Husky or housing assistance, This means taxpayer dollars become available for other investments in our communities.

I ask you to support working families by passing SB 2 and HB 5004. Please make the right decision, the moral and just decision, to increase the minimum wage.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.