



February 7, 2019

Dear Members of the Committee on Education and Labor,

As you reflect upon the implications of instituting a \$15/hr. minimum wage please take into consideration the witness of these faith leaders from a national faith advocacy organizations and congregations. They offer testimony on behalf of millions of members across the nation and speak to the deeper moral issue at stake in fair pay. We urge Congress to pass the *Raise the Wage Act of 2019*.

Sandy Sorensen, Director, Washington Office, United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries:

“At the heart of our lives as Christians is a call to pursue economic justice by caring for the poor, the vulnerable and the least among us. Adopting a \$15 minimum wage is an important step in living out that call by envisioning a world where all people lead lives of opportunity and dignity. Right now millions of Americans are not making a wage that can sustain their lives and families. Shame on us for not pursuing policies that ensure everyone is able to provide for their wellbeing.”

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism:

Jewish tradition instructs us to treat workers with dignity, including paying fair wages. The Talmud teaches “one who withholds an employee’s wages is as though he deprived him of his life” (Baba Metzia 112a). No family should be forced to choose between food, housing, or health care because they do not have access to a living wage.

Relying on an outdated and insufficient minimum wage traps people in poverty, perpetuates economic inequality, and deprives hardworking Americans of the ability to provide for their families. A \$15 hourly wage is the minimum needed to address this modern injustice. Congress must increase the federal minimum wage.

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice:

“Hebrew and Christian scriptures exhort employers to pay just compensation to workers—especially those who depend most on their wages for survival. In the United States higher minimum wages increase family incomes for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. These are the workers who most need a raise to survive. Income

inequality and dwindling paychecks are now among the most urgent economic issues of our time. A \$15 minimum wage is a widely accepted benchmark to address it.

Pope Francis reminds us that the struggle of poor, working people is not first a 'social or political question. No! It is the Gospel, pure and simple'.

This is not a radical idea. Jurisdictions across the nation have already adopted the \$15 minimum wage, thus providing raises for a total of 22 million low-income workers. African Americans, Latinos, and women make up a disproportionate number of workers earning wages below \$15 an hour. They power some of the largest, fastest-growing, and most important industries and deserve to be paid a wage they can live on. A \$15 minimum wage would offer a real and significant improvement in the ability of women and people of color to make ends meet. It would help to mend the persistent gender and race-based pay and wealth gaps.

'A laborer is worthy of his [and her!] wages.' (1 Tim 5:18) It is past-time for Congress to step-up and do the moral thing: adopt a universal \$15 minimum wage to improve the lives of all low-income workers across the nation."

Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World:

"At Bread for the World, we believe that the preferred way to end hunger is to ensure that everyone who wants a job can get one and that it pays a living wage. Wages have been stagnant for decades- meaning that workers are earning less, inequality is rising, and families can't make ends meet.

Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would significantly reduce hunger in America. The Bible is clear, "The laborer deserves to be paid" (1 Timothy 5:18)."

Rev. Ebony J. Grison, Director, Ecumenical Poverty Initiative:

"Minimum wage jobs help to keep America running. In years past, they provided our first jobs. Increasingly, they sustain entire families. These jobs provide a foundation for our daily lives in industries on which we depend, yet often take for granted. From sea to shining sea, minimum wage jobs undergird the American economy. Our current national minimum wage is not enough money to sustain workers or the American families. A \$15 minimum wage would allow workers to sustain their families, even as we begin to address some of our deep economic inequalities.

The cost of living in the United States has long eclipsed its minimum wage. In many cases, minimum wage workers work themselves into poverty trying to make ends meet. No one in this country should work a full-time job (let alone two) and still be poor. To paraphrase Romans 4:4, an increased minimum wage is not a gift, it is long overdue. Increasing the minimum wage is economic justice. Congress, please do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is within your power to do. (Proverbs 3:27)"

Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO National Council of Jewish Women:

“Jewish texts teach the importance of kavod ha'briyot, respect and dignity for all people. The National Council of Jewish Women supports a living wage for all, so that workers can support themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities. Raising the minimum wage is especially important for women and people of color, who disproportionately earn less than \$15 an hour.”

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries Director:

The masses are just one paycheck, furlough or government shutdown away from bankruptcy so just having a job doesn't prevent anyone from being in poverty. We need a fair living wage so the economically insecure can save and grow their income. Raising wages is economic and equal justice that provide resources that empower families, communities and thus our nation.

Rev. William H. Lamar IV, Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church:

The prosperity of this country is largely the result of the labor of citizens who are not compensated fairly. The gleaming buildings, the vibrant restaurant scene, and the cultural offerings enjoyed by many would not exist without committed working women and men. Wealth and power accumulate at the top. And the wealthy influence politics on behalf of policies that protect and extend their power. If indeed our legislators are servants of all the people, then a \$15 per hour minimum wage must be supported. Don't let the money of the connected silence the morality of treating all labor with dignity.

Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation:

“As Quakers, we believe that a just society affirms the dignity and worth of every human being. People gain dignity from work and find well-being and meaning when their work is compensated with a decent wage. The federal minimum wage is completely inadequate--for many households, it is a poverty level wage. A parent working full time at minimum wage should be able to provide for his or her children. It is far past time for Congress to take action. It is time that Congress raises the minimum wage.”

The Reverend Jimmie R. Hawkins, Director of the Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

“As Christians we believe that God has imbued work with inherent dignity. We believe that poverty in a world of abundance is a sin and that work of all skills levels should provide a living wage that maintains workers and their families with enough of what

all people need. When viewing the federal minimum wage, not only is \$7.25 per hour an inadequate wage to maintain families above the poverty, but the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers, workers with the disabilities, and young workers is a travesty and an abuse of the U.S. workforce. A \$15 per hour minimum wage is a good step toward lifting families out of poverty and restoring dignity to labor of all kinds. The Presbyterian Church (USA) strongly supports the Raise the Wage Act, which would raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and eliminate the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers, workers with disabilities, and youth workers.”

Rebecca Linder Blachly, Director of Government Relations, The Episcopal Church:

The minimum wage is not only about supporting workers and their families; it is also a moral issue about the value and dignity of individuals and the contributions they make through paid work. Supporting an increase to the minimum wage so that workers earn an income above the poverty line is one way for us to demonstrate that all people, including minimum wage earners, are worthy of respect and a decent standard of living.

The Episcopal Church supports the Raise the Wage Act of 2019, a bill that is in line with several official Church policies passed over the past two decades. Since 2015, the Church has called directly for a \$15 minimum wage.

Lawrence E. Couch, Director of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd:

“In this nation of riches, hard work is rewarded – but not for all. Millions of workers in the United States are underpaid for their labors and the crushing effects ripple across our country – mothers and fathers who die far too young; children who go to school hungry and whose futures are bleak.

The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd calls on Congress to mandate a \$15 per hour wage floor.

When people work full time, they should be able to feed, clothe, educate, and provide shelter for themselves and their families. Who can do that with the current minimum wage? Let's raise the minimum wage to at least \$15 per hour as a step toward recognizing people's hard work and providing them with the financial recognition they deserve. And by raising the minimum wage, we will lift millions of people out of poverty. 'So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.' (James 4:17)”

Patrick Carolan, Executive Director of Franciscan Action Network:

“Inspired by the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare, Franciscans are called to read the signs of the times, critique abuses of power, and follow an ethic based on the inviolable dignity of all people. The Franciscan Action Network believes that fair compensation for one's work is fundamental to the dignity of the person. Our economy should be

based on a system that protects the basic rights of workers, the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions. Work is not just a process to make a living; it is part of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then, as Pope Francis said: 'We do not get dignity from power or money or culture. We get dignity from work.'

It is impossible for Americans today to live and support a family on the current minimum wage. Therefore, When one has to work multiple jobs to support themselves and their families this contributes to a breakdown in family life and is not dignified as we remember that each of us is created in the image and likeness of God. This is why the Franciscan Action Network strongly supports instituting a \$15/hr. minimum wage."

Reverend Amy E. Reumann, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

Christian vocation is rooted in the purpose of loving and serving our neighbor. As siblings created in the image of God, we all have a responsibility to honor the dignity and seek the welfare of each human being. Pursuing a common standard for life-sustaining wages and wellbeing is essential to realizing justice and equity in our communities.

We value employment that allows people to serve in their own vocations, while ensuring fair and sufficient wages that provide for food, clothing, health care, and a safe and decent home. A policy that raises the minimum wage to a decent standard can be a step forward in ensuring that all families can live in the dignity and wholeness God envisions for every one of us.

Martin Shupack, Director of Advocacy, Church World Service:

"Many people are just one paycheck, furlough or government shutdown away from financial catastrophe so just having a job doesn't prevent anyone from being in poverty. We need a fair living wage so the economically insecure can save and grow their income. Raising wages is economic and equal justice that provide resources that empower families, communities and thus our nation."