



March 5, 2019

The Honorable Robert Scott, Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member
House Education and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the House Education and Labor Committee,

As leaders representing a broad array of faith traditions, we write to urge you to pass the *Raise the Wage Act of 2019*, (H.R.582) which phases in a \$15 an hour national wage floor by the year 2024. We come from a variety of faith perspectives, but our moral principles and scriptural teachings all affirm the need to promote human dignity by prioritizing vulnerable communities and struggling individuals.

The plight of our neighbors who work hard but still struggle to make ends meet deeply concerns us. Moving towards a universal wage floor of \$15 an hour will provide for workers' financial well-being and societal self-worth. Phasing out the outdated subminimum wage for tipped workers, workers under the age of 20, and those with disabilities is the right thing to do and is long-overdue. Moreover, an annually adjusted minimum wage based on the nation's median hourly wages would go far to curtail the growing pay inequality between the lowest-paid workers and the middle-class.

Workers Deserve To Live with Dignity

According to our faith traditions, justice requires that every worker receive a just wage that provides a standard of living in accordance with their God-given dignity. The current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour and \$2.13 an hour for tipped workers is woefully insufficient and has remained stagnant for a decade. Adjusting for inflation, the minimum wage today is worth 25 percent less than 1968. The equivalent value today would set the minimum wage at \$19.25 an hour. As a result, a 2018 study by the Federal Reserve found that 4 in 10 adults do not have sufficient savings to tide them over in case of a critical \$400 unexpected expense.¹ In a robust economy, that statistic startles and disturbs. The lowest paid people in our society have been shamefully neglected.

Our families and our economy have been increasingly burdened by wage stagnation and income inequality. The Raise the Wage Act of 2019 will begin to lighten this burden by raising the wage floor to broadly impact those at the bottom of the workforce. The provisions of the Raise the Wage Act take substantive steps to ensure that the wages people earn are enough to provide for their livelihoods. Gradually raising the minimum wage to \$15 by 2024 would directly or indirectly lift wages for 39.7 million workers, or over a quarter of the wage-earning workforce. Ninety percent of those workers are over the age of 20. Additionally, this legislation corrects the harmful and

¹ <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2017-report-economic-well-being-us-households-201805.pdf>

exploitative practice of under-paying individuals with disabilities by recognizing the value of their work, and paying them accordingly².

Believing people in historically impoverished areas can “get by” on less disregards the workers’ lived experiences of caring for dependents and loved ones; getting transportation; unexpected medical, legal, and educational expenses; and trying to save to establish a home or family. The Raise the Wage Act will enable our most vulnerable workers to make ends meet. Moreover, \$15 an hour by 2024 is not overly generous—especially after accounting for 5 years of inflation which puts its value at \$13 an hour in spending power. By 2024, a single adult without children working full time, year-round in areas across the United States will need at least \$15 an hour to achieve a modest but adequate standard of living³. A fair wage floor does not preclude lifting the minimum wage in high-cost areas. Each of these people deserves to earn the established national wage floor—regardless of where they live:

- The single mother of two working as a home care aide in Hamilton, Alabama should earn enough to support her family, and pay for the transportation and childcare that enables her to work.
- The college student working in St. Louis, Missouri as an usher at the theater should earn enough to help pay tuition and housing costs and not be hampered for decades with high-interest student loans.
- The Baby-Boomer grandfather working as a cashier in Ely, Nevada should earn enough to cover his prescription drug costs, foster his grandchild while their parents are unable, and maintain emergency savings.
- The greeter with a disability working at the San Francisco, California Wal-Mart should earn at least the federal minimum wage to support himself and maintain an independent life.

Adjustments for high-cost places like New York City and Denver, Colorado may be applied at the local and state level—to establish a higher wage than the federal floor.

Unjust Legacies Must Be Corrected

We are mindful that a \$15 wage floor generates economic benefits to workers, employers, and their communities. Benefits include increased consumer spending power, increased housing and food security, increased local economic activity, decreased reliance on safety net programs, increased employee and employer productivity. Moreover, robust evidence contradicts fears of economic ruin and massive job loss.⁴

The faith community, however, is focused on the moral lens: the Raise the Wage Act would result in a more just nation by beginning to correct some of the deep, systemic injustices baked into our labor market and pay practices. Passage of the bill will begin to upend some of our nation’s most persistent inequalities:

- The gender pay gap,
- Racial discrimination in the labor market, and
- Regional socioeconomic divides between rural and urban, between economically thriving and struggling communities.

² “Why America Needs a \$15 Minimum Wage” www.epi.org/127246

³ “Why America Needs a \$15 Minimum Wage” www.epi.org/127246

⁴ <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/making-economic-case-15-minimum-wage/>

This legislation particularly benefits women, people of color, rural counties and Southern cities where a variety of social, political, and economic forces have depressed wages. According to one analysis, over half of all women of color across the nation would benefit from raising the minimum wage. In Idaho, for instance, 68.6 percent of black women would get a raise under this legislation.⁵ Nationwide, forty percent of African Americans and 34 percent of Latinos would get a raise under the Raise the Wage Act. Communities and states with a low cost of living would stand to benefit the most from impacts of raising the wage floor. In states like Nevada and Mississippi, where wages are low and many people work minimum-wage jobs, 40.3 and 41.6 percent of workers, respectively, would see their pay go up.⁶ A higher and inflation-adjusted minimum wage would dramatically lower poverty rates in these communities.

The undersigned faith-based advocacy and religious organizations enthusiastically support the Raise the Wage Act of 2019, as introduced last month. The time for this legislation is long overdue. Justice cannot wait; and neither can Americans who labor every day with insufficient pay. We call on Congress to enact this important piece of legislation as quickly as possible, and for President Trump to sign it when it comes to his desk.

American Friends Service Committee
Bread for the World
Church World Service
Conference of Superiors of Men (Catholic)
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise Province
Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)
Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
Ecumenical Poverty Initiative
Faith in Public Life
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Interfaith Worker Justice
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Poligon Education Fund
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries

⁵ <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/ten-years-without-a-raise/>

⁶ <https://www.fastcompany.com/90304726/this-map-shows-where-an-increased-minimum-wage-would-boost-incomes-the-most>