

Dear Chairwoman Williams & members of the House Labor committee,

I am writing to you today to urge your strong support for raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in order to bring us closer to achieving the true promise made by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he signed the Fair Labor Relations Act in the 1930's, which established the minimum wage. This was not done to give teenagers an opportunity to get their first job, or any of the other tirelessly regurgitated false claims that will be made by the NFIB or Chamber of Carbon lobbyists today. Teenagers shouldn't have to go get a job at McDonald's when the family needs help or they need new clothes and their parents are too stressed over the bills they already have, because their paychecks are often a joke as well. Teenagers should get to be teenagers. They'll likely have to work the rest of their lives as it is anyway. We've also heard already we shouldn't raise the wage because of struggling businesses restricted by the pandemic. Mysteriously no one turns their attention to how the wealthy CEO's of companies like LifeSpan have gotten cushy bonuses and golden parachutes, in the middle of an pandemic that have killed off legions of their workforce. Some criticisms have come in the context of examples like "should McDonald's workers earn the same When they made the claim that raising the minimum wage to \$15 in New York City would kill the restaurant industry, the city council passed it anyway because they recognized the true reality that the minimum wage was created to be just that, the minimum standard a working person needs to make in order to afford the basic minimum necessities one needs to live: food, shelter, clothing, etc. In the decades since FDR's creation of the minimum wage, we have lost sight of this goal. If we adjusted for inflation today, the federal minimum wage would be nearly \$25 dollars an hour. The business lobby also incessantly reiterates these raises will be passed on to customers in the form of higher prices for customers. And as usual, this overblown claim never pans out. Any increase that does happen is bare cents on the dollar, and to be frank, I will pay that extra few cents for my morning coffee so that the barista making it can pay their rent and put food on their table. In most cases, the person holding that job won't be the typical case the business lobby presents to you (i.e; a teenager in their first job). Most of the time, its more likely to be a single mom, or an ex-con with no other good prospects, just trying to get back on their feet and become a productive contributing member of society again. While the Senate has already taken the big step of passing this measure, it did fail to address hazard pay for these frontline workers, and it left out the extremely vulnerable population of our workforce who work for tips. RI's current "tip credit" system effectively allows employers to deduct tips made by employees from their hourly paychecks, creating a particularly cruel form of wage theft. Frankly, it is time to do away with the tipped wage and enact true parity for these most essential employees. Betting making your rent on the spare change of your customers is no good way of working for a living. The bill should also be amended to tie any more increases to cost of living increases and increases in productivity, so the the legislature doesn't have to go through debating any more increases. Failing to make this change so far has resulted in the lost income of nearly \$16/hr to these most essential workers. But to put this bill into greater context, implementing a living wage is exceedingly escaping our reach. The Fight for \$15 started in 2013, so starting this year it should realistically become the Fight for \$17. and to the claims of those who also ignorantly claim this would be unfair to other grossly unpaid non-minimum wage positions such as teachers & EMTs, we are talking about an annual salary for \$15/hr of just over \$31,000 a year, and that is before taxes/deductions. The Senate President himself stated in November that this is not a lot of money at all, and he is

absolutely right. To further make my point, Rhode Island had the highest poverty rate in the our region, at an astounding 13% of our population. 11% of Rhode Island residents are food insecure. Over 40% are cost-burdened when it comes to finding affordable housing. Currently, a minimum wage worker has to work an outrageously high average of 66 hours a week just to afford the fair market value of a modest studio apartment in our state. To put this into further detail, the bottom 20% of income earners makes the annual income for \$15/hr in exactly zero of this committee member's districts. Enacting this policy in fact will only improve the economy. Workers in this income range end up spending over 97% of their income annually, while those among the top income level only contribute about 3% of their income back into the economy each year. When we raise the minimum wage, these workers have more money to contribute to local businesses by way of: buying groceries, getting take-out, or going to the movies just for some examples. I once again strongly urge you to help our most essential workers and boost our economy by enacting these proposals. Thank You.

Sincerely,

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