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Testimony on H-5029, Minimum Wages House Labor Committee March 5, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairperson Corvese and members of the House Labor Committee. My name is Jocelyn Antonio, and I serve as the Director of Program Implementation and Policy at the Hassenfeld Child Health Innovation Institute at the Brown University School of Public Health. I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity.

I strongly urge your **support** for **H-5029 – An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Minimum Wages**, sponsored by Representative Bennet and co-sponsored by Representatives Potter, Diaz, Edwawrds, Slater, Corvese, Solomon, Craven, Kazarian, and Casimiro.

This legislation proposes a gradual increase in the state’s minimum wage from \$15 to \$20 over a five-year period, reaching \$20 by January 1, 2030. This legislation represents a critical step toward enhancing the well-being of Rhode Island’s residents.

Minimum Wage Increases and Health Outcomes

Research has consistently demonstrated a positive correlation between higher minimum wages and improved health metrics. For example:

- **Mental Health Benefits:** Increased wages have been linked to reductions in suicide rates and depressive symptoms, as financial stress is a known contributor to mental health issues.¹
- **Physical Health Improvements:** Higher income levels enable individuals to afford healthier food options, engage in preventative healthcare and reduce exposure to chronic stressors, thereby lowering the incidence of conditions such as hypertension and obesity.²
- **Maternal and Child Health Improvements:** Economically stable mothers report less financial strain, food insecurity, decreased depressive and anxiety symptoms, and increased self-esteem and physical health, increased prenatal care.^{3,4}

Economic Stability and Access to HealthCare

Raising the minimum wage contributes to economic stability. Economic stability is a fundamental social determinant of health.⁵ Economic stability includes employment, income, noncash benefits, wealth, and financial services.⁶ Economic stability enables access to healthy and nutritious foods, secure housing, education, access to quality health care and is intrinsically linked to health outcomes.^{6,7} Individuals with higher incomes are more likely to have access to healthcare services, whether through employer-provided insurance or the ability to afford out-of-pocket expenses. This access facilitates early detection and management of health conditions, reducing the burden of disease in the community.⁸

Addressing Health Disparities

Low-wage workers often belong to marginalized communities that face significant health disparities. By increasing the minimum wage, we can reduce income inequality and its associated health inequities, promoting a more just and healthy society.⁸

Potential Considerations

While the benefits are substantial, it is important to consider potential challenges. Some studies suggest that increases in minimum wage may lead to a slight decrease in employer-sponsored health insurance offerings. A study by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that a \$1 increase in minimum wage was associated with a small decrease in the percentage of employers offering health insurance. However, the overall health benefits of increased wages may outweigh this concern, especially if alternative healthcare access strategies are implemented.⁹

Conclusion

House Bill 5029 presents a valuable opportunity to enhance public health in Rhode Island through economic empowerment. By incrementally raising the minimum wage to \$20 per hour by 2030, we can expect improvements in mental and physical health outcomes, greater economic stability, and a reduction in health disparities. I strongly urge the committee to support this legislation for the betterment of our community's health and well-being.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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