

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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April 13, 2015

To: Senate Workforce and House Business and Labor Committees
From: Jan Elfers, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Dear Chairs Dembrow and Holvey and Committee Members:

My name is Janet Elfers and I am the Public Policy Director at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of religious denominations, congregations and community-based cooperative ministries. We represent hundreds of Oregonians in every rural and urban community throughout the state. Our testimony today emanates from our shared religious values, which affirm the value and dignity of every human being and the responsibility of a just society to help create opportunities for its citizens to thrive. We urge you to support raising the minimum wage, in order to enable hard working Oregonians to better provide for themselves and their families.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is committed to promoting both the welfare of all children and the overall health and economic stability of families and communities. Today, a worker earning minimum wage at a full-time job does not make enough to afford housing, food, gas and other necessities for a family. Many of these low wage workers must depend upon government benefits. Systematic low wage work means the demand for public services is at a record high. For example, over 1 million Oregonians now rely on food stamps or other assistance to feed their families. Valuing workers for the service they provide is an important step towards economic justice. When people work full-time, they should be able to meet the basic needs of life.

The legislation before you is supported by leaders in business, faith, labor and community organizations. These leaders realize that with over 400,000 Oregonians employed in low wage jobs, this segment of the labor force makes up an increasing share of Oregon's economy. The growth of income inequality in our nation needs to be addressed, and raising the minimum wage is the quickest and most effective way to deal with this disparity. Raising the minimum wage honors the many low wage workers who are often immigrants, women, elders, youth and people of color. They include mothers and fathers who are forced to work erratic schedules and non-standard shifts, making parenting responsibilities even more difficult.

We are called to act in solidarity with those living on the margins. Justice requires us to establish social and economic systems that encourage, enable and empower all people to develop and use their capabilities to meet their needs and to contribute to the social welfare. Raising the minimum wage is a minimal step in establishing such a system. Oregon's economy needs to work for all Oregonians, not just a few.

We urge you to raise the minimum wage, to give every Oregonian a fair chance for a hopeful future.

Respectfully,

Jan Elfers
Public Policy Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon