



Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian Testimony

April 13, 2015

Mr. Chair, committee members, I am Brad Avakian, Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries. As Commissioner, it's my job to closely monitor, enforce and manage the yearly adjustments to Oregon's minimum wage.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of raising Oregon's minimum wage. Little would have kept me from personally appearing, but I am at this moment at the University of Oklahoma attending my daughter Claire's graduation performance. I am, however, closely following the Committee's good work on the topic.

Around the state, Oregon workers and many businesses are calling for a higher minimum wage and a fair shot at economic opportunity. They're right – and the time to raise our state's minimum wage is now.

When we raise our minimum wage, we boost the purchasing power of consumers around the state. That's good for workers and their families, but also for our economy as a whole. Virtually every dime earned in a higher minimum wage is reinvested in local businesses as workers pay rent and buy groceries, school supplies and other essentials.

The Committee has several minimum wage bills before it. For example, raising the minimum wage to ensure that a family of four can live above the poverty line would give a raise to about 450,000 Oregonians, generating more than \$188 million per year in new purchasing power. Raising Oregon's wage floor to \$15 an hour would give more than a million workers would see a boost in pay, putting \$760 million more per year in people's pockets.

One of the reasons that we're hearing louder calls for a higher minimum wage is that our economy – and the workforce that supports it - has changed. A common misconception about the minimum wage worker is that they are mostly teenagers, just starting out and doing part time work. But that's just not the case anymore. Today's minimum wage worker is likely to be a woman in her thirties, working full time, with many supporting a family.

In fact, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 62 percent of America's minimum wage workers are female. And, the Economic Policy Institute tells us that about 80 percent of all minimum wage workers are now 20 years old or older.

We have the opportunity to build a stronger economy for everyone by raising our minimum wage. We can address growing inequality and ensure that consumers have the purchasing power to support local business. For these reasons, I encourage you to raise the minimum wage now. I would be pleased to return to the committee at your convenience should you have any questions.