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April 9, 2015

House Committee on Business and Labor
Senate Committee on Workforce

Re: Opposition to Changing Oregon's Minimum Wage Laws

Honorable Representative Holvey and Honorable Senator Debrow;

I am the proud owner of the Washington Street Steakhouse in Dallas, Oregon. This is a small, rural community we serve with 7 full-time and 21 part-time employees. We serve nothing but the best in local and healthy foods and have built this business from an empty building 16 years ago in Dallas. We have struggled to survive the Great Recession of 2009 – 2014, are just now seeing an up-tick in business. We used our savings, a lot of hard work, and faith in our community to get to 2015.

With business just now – 2015 – starting to improve, we need to hire employees. This is a serious decision for us, because when we hire them, we train and want them to stay with us. They start at minimum wage, but by developing good customer-friendly skills, they end up make several times more than that in tips. Accordingly, we give them timely merit increases, flexible work schedules, and the best benefits we can afford. They love working here and our customers are happy.

Your thinking about re-setting the entry wage will change all of that. What do I say to the loyal and trained employees if the new employees (if I can find them or afford them) we hire are paid expensive entry wages? Where is the incentive to learn if we pay them the same or more than those who've proven themselves? This means we will have to increase everyone's pay. Great, customers will not want to pay a 30% - to 50% more, and employees will not see the results of their hard work in tips from those customers.

We may need to hire new employees – with any changes to minimum wage rates, coupled with the requirement to paid mandatory paid sick leave hurts everyone. Don't buy the "hype about the hike" – our employees make a good, living wage by earning it. Let them do that and help small businesses, please.

Debi Conway
Owner