



Green Mountain Self-Advocates

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House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs

Minimum Wage Testimony 2.16.17

Max Barrows

Good Afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the importance of paying livable wages.

I am Max Barrows. I am person with Autism and I live with my family in Worcester, Vermont. I work for Green Mountain Self-Advocates as Outreach Director and I receive developmental services to support me on my job.

Green Mountain Self-Advocates is a statewide disability rights organization for people with developmental disabilities. One of the top priorities for our more than 600 members is to have a job. One barrier to employment for people with developmental disabilities is accessing support to find and keep a job. Many people with disabilities rely on a job coach to work. The good news is that we have a system that has amazing Vermonters who love their jobs providing support and care to people with disabilities. They are the backbone of the service system and everyday heroes going out of their way to make a difference in people's lives. But support workers do not make a livable wage! Sometimes they have no choice but to quit a job they love, working with people with disabilities, to take another job just for better pay. Over the past 3 years, the Designated Providers of Mental Health and Developmental Services determined there was a 27% turnover rate for our support staff. A livable wage will go a long way toward reducing staff turnover.

It is not easy for people with disabilities to constantly adapt to staff changes. Often, we go without services when waiting for new staff to be hired. It requires us to start all over again with relationship building, training, and orientation. Providers have estimated that it may cost as much as \$5,000 or more to train a new support worker. That is a lot of wasted time and money.

Most people with developmental disabilities don't drive, myself included. So, losing a staff person can lead to unemployment because we are not able to make it to work. All of this has ripple effects on our emotional and mental wellbeing.

In closing I want you to know that Green Mountain Self-Advocates supports a \$15 minimum wage which would give 85,000 workers with and without disabilities a raise. It is myth that minimum wage jobs are only held by young people working part time. According to research completed by Public Assets, just 6 % of Vermont workers earning under \$15 are young workers aged 18-19. Most workers earning less than \$15 are in their 30's, 40's, 50's and 60's. 52 % are women. 59 % of African-Americans and 25 % of Latinos in the state earn less than \$15. 72 % work full-time. 33 % have some college experience or have earned an Associate's degree, and an additional 24 % have a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Ensuring that our lowest paid workers have enough money to provide for themselves and their families will make all our families and communities healthier. This is a real way Vermont can put people first!