

Written Testimony submitted by **Audra Hughes, Commodities Market, Winooski and Stowe**

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We opened Commodities Natural Market in Stowe 2 years ago (and Winooski this past December). For the purpose of tonight's meeting and my letter, I'm going to focus on Stowe-- staffing is one of the greatest challenges in owning and operating a business in Stowe. I'm pretty thrilled that in 2 years, we are employing 13-15 Vermont residents at any given time and we have always paid them above the minimum wage and holidays even when we're closed. With the new Paid Time Off regulations, we're also incorporating that into our benefits & compensation which is challenging with a staff of 75% part timers. Our employees get discounts for their families, lots of free goods and perks whether it's buying snow tires (thanks to your program!), SAA member discounts, accrued maternity leave and more. We like our staff to feel well-liked and valued. Based on the number of original hires who still work for us, I like to think we have a great relationship with them.

However, if I were to pay a stock position \$15/hour and incrementally higher for other positions including management, in addition to 3 days paid time off, well, that's a significant increase in my overhead.

We make every effort imaginable to keep our prices as low as possible and it would be impossible NOT to raise our prices to cover these extra costs. I would not feel comfortable doing this nor would our customer understand or care why we had to do so. They'd simply take their business elsewhere.

\$15/hour in a community that's partially sustained by tourism and visitors is a challenge. It's half that in New Hampshire! (They voted an increase down last February). On one hand, you'd think those working in hospitality in NH would flee to Vermont to work but the reality is that the restaurants and hotels would have to raise their prices significantly and reduce their overhead to cover this cost.

Affordable childcare: YES. Affordable housing: YES. Minimum Wage \$15/hour: NO WAY.

Thanks for listening.