

To the Representatives on the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs:

RE: \$15/hour legislation

I understand the idea behind a living wage is very good. I have argued in the past there is no reason my tax dollars (in the form of section 8 housing, food stamps, tax relief, etc.) should be used to supplement employees working a full time job, only because their employers do not want to pay them enough money to live on. I also understand that paying employees more would drive up the cost of products.

There is no question in my mind that a person who works 40 hours/week should make enough money to afford the basic necessities of life, such as food, housing, and clothing.

However, before raising the minimum wage, I believe there are two things that need to be seriously considered.

First and of vital importance, what about people on a fixed income who rely on State services to survive?

Let's look at the case of a disabled person on Medicaid trying to live independently. Their daily needs are evaluated annually, at which time each step of their personal care from dressing to food preparation is recorded down to the minute. There is no "fudge factor" added in. (I have personally been in a room when a VNA nurse had to leave because something had taken longer than it should and I was asked to finish the care.) Based on the evaluation, the State gives the disabled person a budget which is worked out to approximately \$10/hour to hire personal care attendants as their employees (which is high compared to other states).

If Vermont goes through with the \$15/hour minimum wage increase that is being proposed, the disabled will be forced to pay their care givers \$15 per hour. Medicaid recipients are very low income and cannot afford to pay the additional costs out of pocket. Is the State going to increase a disabled individual's annual care budget by one third? If not, what are they to do? What part of their care must they be expected to skip? Do they forego using the washroom 1/3 less times each day? Do they skip one meal a day? Or only bathe every second day? What part of their care are we asking them to give up?

Or do we say to them, "Sorry, quality of life does not matter. We no longer will support you living independently. You must move into a nursing home and sit there until you die."

With all this talk lately about the "rights" of undocumented immigrants and the "rights" of refugees to come to this county and receive services, how can we not recognize the rights of the most vulnerable in our society, the disabled, to live an independent and productive life? Should their rights not come first? Who will stand up for them?

Second, will raising the minimum wage actually get people off subsidies? If not, what have we done besides give minimum wage employees more discretionary income. As I stated above, I don't mind paying more money for products, but this is based on the assumption that I will see a savings in my taxes. If the minimum wage is raised, I want to be sure that this will disqualify most people from food stamps, section 8 housing, "free" medical care, etc.

During a conversation with a State employed social worker, I was told that her clients were afraid that if their income was raised to \$15 per hour, they would no longer qualify for subsidies. Is this not the end goal of raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour? If not, why are we doing this? If we are going to keep people making minimum wage in a "state of welfare" then I see no reason to raise the minimum wage!

It is a bit ironic that I have an interest on both sides of the fight for 15. I am employed as a caregiver for a disabled person (paralyzed from the shoulders down) who lives independently. She has a job. She directs a community chorus. She even became involved in politics and represented Bernie Sanders as a delegate at the Democratic National Convention last year.

I am making just over \$10 per hour. Of course I would like a raise to \$15.

On the other hand, I know that her income is limited and if my wages are raised but not her budget, she could not afford to pay me for the hours of care needed to remain independent.

Creating legislation that forces employers to raise their hourly pay and the State of Vermont not being held to the same standard would be hypocritical to Vermont employers and detrimental to the lives of many Vermonters who are disabled.

The raising of the minimum wage **MUST** be tied to an increase in the fixed budgets of the disabled individuals of this state!

Thank you very much,

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