

Hilarie Mitchell of South Hero

As a working mother of four beautiful children, I have been following the discussion in Vermont around raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour over the next few years. My husband and I face challenges everyday that I know are shared by tens of thousands of Vermont workers who don't earn a livable wage.

I have worked in the medical field for the past twelve years; starting in a private medical practice to working in a more expansive setting to include Copley Hospital and currently the UVM Medical Center. Throughout my years, my various roles ranged from direct clinical care to administrative and medical billing. Many of these positions offered wages that were just under \$15 per hour. While this may seem like decent pay to some folks, our situation was unique in the way that my wages were supporting a husband and four children. We were between a rock and a hard place; choosing between two incomes and 50% of our earnings going toward childcare or one of us working while the other stayed home. It came down to simple math. With an hourly wage of less than \$15 an hour, we would lose money with both of us working. I supported our family on one income for over four years, and it was a struggle to say the least.

It all came to a head the first time I had to visit a food shelf in our community. It was right after my youngest was born. We were so strapped because of my unpaid maternity leave. I sat in my vehicle for 30 minutes, ashamed and thinking of other folks who didn't even have a home, vehicle or job...how could I take from them? I knew then, something wasn't right. Why do Vermonters spend 40 hours a week working, just to struggle? I mustered up the courage to go inside and the support our family received was amazing.

The state of Vermont seriously needs to lift up working families like ours by raising the minimum wage *and* reasonably eliminating the benefits cliff. Many folks make just enough to disqualify their family from receiving helpful benefits for food, childcare and heating, but still struggle with these necessities every day. The ratio of housing costs to income is too off balance for people to have a solid, sustainable future. Factor in the cost of health care, child care, retirement and education costs and it points to the conclusion that Vermonters are being set up to fail.

As a low-wage household, I worry about my children's future; college, transportation, extracurricular opportunities, and stability. No parent wants their child to struggle just to get their basic needs met. With a better wage, we wouldn't have to choose between one spouse working and another staying home. I would have a lot more in retirement and wouldn't have to take as long to earn my college degree. Our family could put more back into our local community and use our earnings to support local businesses, raise money to improve recreational activities for children and people in our town and contribute to essential programs such as the food shelves in Vermont that have helped our family in a time of need.

With over 60,000 Vermonters living below the federal poverty line, we need to take serious action to address the poverty and rising inequality in our state. Raising the minimum wage to \$15/hr would benefit tens of thousands of low wage workers, boost local economic growth, and

improve the health of our families and communities. I am not naive to the many working parts involved in making this happen. It won't be easy, but something needs to be done to ensure that young families and Vermonters earn a wage that will afford them reasonable access to housing, childcare and everything in between. Our children and future generations depend on us to pave the way to a future with less poverty and more opportunity. It matters.

Comment [1]: add in personal conclusion

Comment [2]: _Marked as resolved_

Comment [3]: _Re-opened_