

Brenda Siegel - Vote yes on the \$15/hr Minimum Wage

My name is Brenda Lynn Siegel and I live in Newfane, VT. I am the Executive and Artistic Director of the Southern Vermont Dance Festival in the Brattleboro area which is designed as a long term economic driver for the area as a response to Tropical Storm Irene in which my son and I lost all of our belongings. I am also the recipient of Food Stamps, section 8 housing, fuel assistance and Medicaid. I want to urge you to vote to raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour. This needs to be the case tomorrow, but, a bill that raises it by 2022 is a start and needs to happen this session.

I want to begin by encouraging us all to see a Vermont where all of our friends, neighbors and family members have what we need, I want you to envision a Vermont where our businesses are patronized and our economy thrives. This can only happen if we choose to create policy that lifts all of us up, it is not possible in a state where our citizens can't afford basic needs. The impacts of poverty trickle up as opposed to the benefits of wealth trickling down. Those impacts now affect our businesses, our schools and overall our state.

A \$15/hour minimum wage would allow Vermonters like myself to have stronger purchasing power, helping build up our small businesses, reduce our burden on tax payers and ultimately put an estimated 240 million directly into Vermonters pockets.

I grew up in an upper middle class family, I know the difference between the opportunities that my son has versus the ones I had. I see the difference between my own responsibilities vs. that of a family who is not struggling to make ends meet. In my own family in our lowest financial moments we have had to cut corners on necessary household items. I have skipped meals so that my son could eat a healthy meal or even so that I could free up enough money to buy my son some shoes when his had holes in them. These are just some examples of sacrifices I have made and what is important to note is that my struggle does not come close to that some of our fellow Vermonters face every day.

We have to ask ourselves, is this the Vermont we want to live in? I think we can do better.

Some have said we shouldn't raise the minimum wage because of the "benefits cliff" issue.. However, this cliff is a problem today and keeping a sub-livable wage does not protect those of us who receive benefits, it just prevents us from having a way out. I believe that it is the with the best intentions that people are afraid to raise the wage out of fear that people like me will lose our benefits, but, I am here to tell you that while that problem is very real, it is real now, today and was real when the wage was lower as well. It is a separate issue that certainly intersects with wage increase, but, it should not prevent any legislators from voting yes as these bills come before you. In fact, the increase in local spending caused by a higher minimum wage, along with a stronger tax base will give you flexibility to address issues just like these. We should be fixing the problem of the benefits cliff by properly funding our benefits programs so people like me are not held back from taking raises, promotions, or more hours. And, we should bring the minimum wage up to a livable wage. We can, and must, do both.

I want to see a Vermont where our economy thrives I want to see a Vermont where those at the top contribute their fair share and those at the bottom are empowered to participate in our economy in way that they currently are not able. Our state has the power to continue to be a national leader in the movement for economic justice and fairness, and today I am asking you to say yes to a Vermont that works for all of us and not just those at the top. Say yes to raising the wage to \$15/hour by 2022. Thank you for your leadership on this very important issue.