

Chelsea Wright - Help Struggling Vermonters by raising the wage

My name is Chelsea Wright. I live in Burlington, have \$10,000 in student debt, pay \$700 a month in rent, not to mention all of my other bills, and only make \$12 an hour. I am speaking out today to express my concern about poverty wages in Vermont. The call to action must happen now - why have we even allowed this issue to get to the point, where is this up for debate?

The Senate just passed a bill that would get Vermont up to \$15 an hour by 2024, that's over the next six years. If that's too fast for our legislators and our Governor, then I think they need to get out of their bubble and step into the shoes of tens of thousands of low paid workers like me.

My name, Chelsea Wright, used to be very important to me - I learned from teachers and guides throughout school and into my twenties, that self value is everything. To follow my dreams, and to always use my imagination. Over time, through my experiences with poverty, I lost my sense of identity and self love. I fought hard for a long time - I went to college and got straight As, I was on the dean's list, I did work study and since have worked some incredible jobs. But it hasn't been enough to get me ahead financially. I also spent most of my twenties raising my sister who is 12 years younger than me - this part of my life and story, also being a massive side effect of poverty. All of this hard work, and I still am at a complete loss as to how to move forward as a financially successful adult.

I am currently working as a caregiver for the elderly. My wage is far below the value of my work and time its worth. Elderly care is incredibly important, and as Vermont's demographics are shifting towards the larger percentage of the population being folks 60 years of age or older, the need will continue to increase.

As I struggled through poverty growing up, fighting the constant pain that living in a substance and alcohol abuse driven home caused me, it became a survival mechanism to constantly fill my mind with views of a better future, to distract me. I survived through sometimes not having meals, through continuous exposure to physical, mental and emotional abuse, through instability - living in hotels, moving a total of 15 times by the age of 16. Since then, I've moved 12 times - that is one move for every year that I've been alive. I've never lived in once place for longer than 2 years. Can you imagine how it would feel to experience this type of instability? This is due to living in poverty, and coming from this place, I have PTSD not only from the exposure to violence, and lack of love, but also from deeply ingrained fear of not being able to maintain a shelter, income, or food for myself. This in turn has caused me to develop mental health issues, which have lead to physical health issues and personally, has caused me to feel suicidal. No one should ever have to go through this. Being alive is such a gift, and all who are given this gift should have the right to live without being forced into survival mode their entire lives.

This all stems from a broken system, that allows some to get ahead - and well, for the rest of us - good luck.

How can this be? How can the lives of so many, be so devalued? A change such as raising the minimum wage is just scratching the surface of this massive issue, that is an issue of humanity, compassion and basic human rights. This shouldn't be up for question - making this change, is to do what is right, and will change many people's lives in a positive way. I don't ask for anyone's pity in hearing my story - I ask for you to step outside of your reality for a moment, and imagine what it could be like for you - to show gratitude for everything that you do have, by supporting others ability to live, rather than fight.