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HungerFreeVT.org

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

From: Hunger Free Vermont

Re: Committee Hearing on S.40, Relating to Increasing the Minimum Wage

Date: April 4, 2018

Hunger is a pervasive and persistent problem in Vermont. Currently 1 in 10 Vermonters are struggling to afford enough food for themselves and their families. Over 75,000 Vermonters rely on 3SquaresVT benefits to purchase food, and even more visit food shelves across the state each year. Many of these households are working, in fact, more than 45% of households receiving 3SquaresVT have a household member in the workforce. Yet, they still struggle to meet their basic needs. Because food is the most flexible part of a family's budget, when working people cannot meet their basic needs, malnutrition and hunger are the predictable result. It is far easier to save money by buying less nutritious food than risking job security or housing by not paying for a car repair or rent.

Hunger Free Vermont believes that no one in our state should ever go hungry, and that Vermonters have a right to access food through dignified means and traditional channels. Making the minimum wage a living wage would make it possible for those in the labor market to exercise this right. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour will allow more Vermonters to reach economic security.

We also recognize that for many Vermont households, especially those with children, \$15 an hour is still not enough to meet their basic needs, and they will still need access to programs like 3SquaresVT and school meals. For some working households, these benefits will have a higher financial value than the proposed increase in wages. We appreciate that this bill includes language to support working parents' access to child care subsidies while their wages grow, and urge the Committee to also ensure that no families lose access to nutrition benefits and other safety net programs that households will still need.

No working Vermonter should have to prioritize one basic need over another, choosing between putting nutritious food on their table and paying their rent or heating bill. We encourage the members of this Committee to pass S.40 and to consider ways to ensure that Vermonter households are able to maintain access to vital programs like 3SquaresVT and school meals as they move toward economic security.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Faye Conte".

Faye Conte

Advocacy and Education Director