

ACLU-VT Testimony on Minimum Wage
Minimum Wage Public Hearing
April 5, 2018

The ACLU of Vermont is a non-partisan membership organization that works to defend the individual rights and liberties guaranteed in the United States and Vermont constitutions through policy advocacy, litigation, community organizing, and public education. The ACLU has 8,000 members in Vermont and millions of members, activists, and supporters nationwide.

We believe that access to life's basic necessities is critical in order to enjoy the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Vermont and federal constitutions. People cannot participate fully in society and therefore utilize their constitutional and civil liberties if they are struggling to provide for themselves and their families. Without a livable and fair wage, the basic necessities are out of reach for too many Vermonters—over one in ten Vermonters live below the federal poverty line, including 14% of Vermont children. Enacting S. 40 would be an important step towards bringing Vermonters closer to accessing the promises of our state and federal constitutions.

A living wage stands to benefit and enhance Vermonters' civil liberties in myriad ways. For example, the impact of a wage increase on our criminal justice system should not be overlooked. The ACLU of Vermont recently launched a criminal justice reform campaign, Smart Justice Vermont, with a goal of cutting Vermont's prison population in half. According to a 2016 White House report, "Crime and poverty are correlated and criminal behavior is often motivated by a lack of economic opportunity Studies have found that wage increases significantly decrease crime."¹ The report highlights studies that estimate that a 10 percent increase in wages for non-college educated men could result in a 10-20 percent reduction in crime rates. Raising the minimum wage can be expected to have a positive effect on reducing Vermont's crime and incarceration rates, saving Vermont money and improving the lives of hundreds of Vermonters and their families.

That is why the ACLU of Vermont urges the House to join the Senate and pass S. 40 to lift up all Vermonters and continue the work of building a more equitable and just society for all of us.



PO Box 277
Montpelier, VT 05601
(802) 223-6304
acluvt.org

Julie Kalish
President

James Lyall
Executive Director

¹ Executive Office of the President, *Economic Perspectives on Incarceration and the Criminal Justice System* 42 (2016), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/page/files/20160423_cea_incarceration_criminal_justice.pdf.