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Adriel Jubilee McGill; Rights and Democracy

Minimum Wage Testimony

My name is Adriel Jubilee McGill. I live in Bridport with my husband and three children and work as a property manager for the Addison County Community Trust, a nonprofit affordable housing organization. I work every day with those whose lives will be directly affected if they have their pay increased to a livable wage. I am also a member leader with Rights & Democracy Vermont, working on our Organizing Team in Addison County and as a member of our statewide "Raise Up Vermont" issue team, which is focusing on alleviating poverty and exploitation in our state by working to raise the minimum wage, help implement a statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program, and protect workers and consumers from forms of exploitation like misclassification, forced arbitration and wage theft.

Just to give a little bit of background on our organizations, Rights & Democracy is a bi-state activist and advocacy organization based in VT and NH with a diverse membership throughout our state. Our board, leadership committee, and local organizing teams work to address basic issues of social, economic and environmental justice facing our communities, a large part of that work being focused on ensuring livable wages, work with dignity, and basic worker protections. We work with local advocacy organizations, unions and national partners to educate our members and the public and to advance policies that protect the most economically vulnerable in our state.

I also have my own personal experience with earning low wages and the challenges that come with it. Almost exactly six years ago today, my husband and I found out that we were expecting. A few weeks later we discovered not only were we expecting, but we had twins on the way. I had several medical issues from the start, so continuing to work was not an option.

To make up for the loss of my income, my husband began to work six days a week quite regularly, and eight hour days often stretched into nine or ten hours. It was impossible to build up any sort of savings, so the day after we came home from the hospital my husband returned to work. We could only afford for him to miss three days of work for the birth of our children.

I was catapulted into a new life with our older daughter and two, helpless infants. I was largely alone while my husband continued working long hours. The baby blues soon took a darker and deeper tone, I became so entrenched in guilt, exhaustion, sadness, and anxiety, that it consumed me. I had postpartum depression and anxiety.

I lost so much of myself that I became convinced that my husband and children would be better off without me and even planned for how I would end my life. I held off only because the anxiety had me extremely fearful of SIDS. I knew no one else would set alarms to wake up every 15 or 20 minutes to make sure they were still breathing.

Thankfully, before my plan came to pass, my husband got a new job with a better wage, a livable wage. He was able to return to a 40-hour work week and spend more time at home. He was no longer the stranger who left before they woke up and returned after they went to bed. He was finally given the opportunity to fully bond with his children. Laughter and joy returned to our home.

Working so hard to barely meet your basic needs causes an extreme amount of stress. There are no good outcomes when one endures this type of stress long term. It can cause some people to experience complete mental anguish, some are tempted to commit crimes to survive, others seek solace or refuge- even if only fleeting- in life destroying substances. It takes a remarkable toll on the body: memory problems, heart disease, it literally changes the brain structure and can cause damage and a reduced ability to connect.

We have this narrative in our society that people need to pull themselves up by their own boot straps, but I can tell you it is impossible to enact positive change in your life unless you have hope. You have an amazing opportunity to give hope to over 80,000 of our most vulnerable citizens.

I ask that you hold these 80,000 people in your heart as you make your final decisions and help them break the chains that have bound far too many generations of Vermonter's to poverty.

Thank you for taking the time to address this issue, for putting so much time and study into figuring out how we can do this right, and for having the courage to stand up for legislation like this. It is my hope, and the hope of many Vermonters just like me, that you can help bring Vermont's minimum wage up to a livable wage, as well as helping Vermont become a better place for working families by passing paid family leave and helping us strengthen protections for workers and consumers in our state.