



## VERMONT NETWORK

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**House General, Housing and Military Affairs**

**Kara Casey**

**Director of Economic Empowerment**

Hello, my name is Kara Casey and I work for the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. As Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence, the Vermont Network works to promote policies that support victims and survivors of violence to thrive. Raising the minimum wage, as proposed in S.23 is one of our top legislative priorities.

The Vermont Network supports legislation that would help to mitigate the impacts of poverty. Statistics show that people who live in poverty are twice as likely to experience sexual assault<sup>1</sup>. We know that domestic violence often (99% of the time) includes some form of economic abuse.<sup>2</sup> The economic effects of domestic and sexual violence are pervasive and long lasting. Just to give you an idea of the numbers, recent studies estimated the lifetime cost of rape alone was \$122,461 per victim<sup>3</sup> and for intimate partner violence it was \$103,767 per female victim and \$23,414 per male victim<sup>4</sup>, this includes impact to survivors as well as society as a whole. Women, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities and LGBTQ people are most impacted as they already experience a wage gap. Raising the minimum wage will have a positive impact on tens of thousands of low wage workers including survivors and is an important step forward in creating a Vermont where all people can thrive.

Vermont domestic and sexual violence advocates have identified the lack of affordable housing as a major barrier to survivors in gaining economic independence and healing. Affordable housing is a challenge to all Vermonters but especially minimum wage workers. A worker would have to earn \$22.40 an hour to afford a 2 bedroom apartment in Vermont. That's \$22.40 today, not \$15 in 2024. This raise is long over due.

We support the language that was added to S.23 that would create a study committee to look at the impacts of increasing or eliminating the subminimum wage for tipped workers and student workers. The Vermont Network recently signed on to a letter in support of the federal Raise the Wage Act. That letter, written by the National Women's Law Center stated "Poverty-level wages heighten women's economic vulnerability, which in turn heightens their vulnerability to sexual harassment on the job. Women who rely on tips to survive often feel compelled to tolerate inappropriate behavior from customers so as not to jeopardize their

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996

<sup>2</sup> Allstate Foundation Purple Purse

<sup>3</sup> Peterson C, DeGue S, Florence C, Lokey CN. Lifetime Economic Burden of Rape Among U.S. Adults. *Am J Prev Med.* 2017;52(6):691-701.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson C, Kearns MC, McIntosh WL, Estefan LF, Nicolaidis C, McCollister KE, Gordon A, Florence C. *Am J Prev Med.* 2018 Oct; 55(4):433-444. Epub 2018 Aug 22.



income and employers are often unwilling to protect their employees for fear of upsetting a paying customer. Women’s lack of economic power in these workplaces perpetuates the already pervasive culture of sexual harassment in industries that employ large numbers of tipped workers.” These conversations are happening around the country and on the Federal level, and Vermont is not immune to these issues. We believe that it is the perfect time for Vermont to start exploring how we value/undervalue the work of some of the most vulnerable in our state.

We also appreciate the continued attention paid to the potential impacts to families that are on the Child Care Financial Assistance Program. This is a vital resource for survivors with children. We were excited to see the Governor’s commitment to increasing funding for CCFAP and we will continue to work on advocating for the resources that are allocated to this program to match the need.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. We are thankful for all the work that was done in the legislature last year to pass a minimum wage bill and believe we have the opportunity to pass an even stronger bill this session.