



VERMONT COALITION OF RUNAWAY
& HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAMS
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February 5, 2019

Dear Senator Sirotkin and fellow committee members;

We would like to thank you for your work on S.23, an act relating to increasing the minimum wage. This is a vital step for Vermonters. However, we are concerned with a provision in the current draft that states:

An employer shall not employ a secondary school student at a rate of less than the minimum wage established pursuant to subdivision of this subsection minus \$3.00.

32% of Vermont's youth live in families that were considered "low income."¹ During the 2017/18 school year, 41% of students were eligible for free and reduced price meals; and in fiscal year 2017, 1 in 8 Vermonters accessed SNAP benefits, 61% of those being families with children.^{2,3} It is fair to say that poverty in our rural communities is pervasive, leaving many youth and families at risk and living on the edge.

Given these statistics, it is vital that we are paying an adequate wage to ALL employees, regardless of age, to mitigate the impact of generational poverty on young people. We ask you to consider the following:

- High school aged youth from low-income families who are working may be contributing to household expenses, like rent or food expenses, to help their family avoid homelessness.
- Youth who are in high school are often saving their earnings for transitions to adulthood and independent living. Lower wages disadvantages their ability to save for security deposits, future rent payments, and transportation costs needed to secure and maintain housing and employment when they are 18. This increases the risk this transition already causes for youth who coming from low-income families or instable living situations.
- Many youth are using the money they earn in high school to help offset college expenses, especially youth from low-income families. Post-secondary education is already perceived as unattainable for many youth, if they aren't able to save from fair wages while working in high school it may impact their decisions around college affordability and perpetuate generational poverty.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau/ Annie E. Casey Foundation KidsCount, 2016

² Vermont Agency of Education, Nutrition 2018, Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility Report

³ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP factsheet, Vermont, 2018

- There is no definition for "secondary school student" included in the bill and we wonder how older youth who may be enrolled in high school completion programs will be impacted.
- Finally, we firmly believe that working young people add just as much to our economy as their older counterparts and their work should be valued equitably.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these points. Please let us know if there is an opportunity to talk to you further about these impacts or if we can provide any clarifying information.

Sincerely;



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Director

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