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Adriel Jubilee McGill; Rights and Democracy

Minimum Wage Testimony

My name is Jubilee McGill. I live in Bridport with my husband and three children and I am the senior 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 some of the challenges that always come with it. Seven years ago, 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 turned darker. 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 and 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.

One year ago today, I gave this testimony in support of S.40 and I am sure that many of us here shared the same disappointment when it was vetoed. While we have another opportunity to take a pass at this minimum wage bill, I implore you to seize this opportunity to prevent the almost forced harassment of women and people of color in order to get the tips they need and rely on to pay their bills. Nationally,

69% of tipped waitstaff and bartenders are female, and among them you will find this to be a common story. As a young, single mother to my oldest daughter, and a survivor of domestic and sexual violence, I found myself in this position daily as a waitress. I spoke with a friend earlier this month, in tears, who is dealing with the same. She just left her marriage and is trying to rebuild her life after a decade of domestic violence and emotional abuse. At work, a man placed his hand on her buttocks, and despite every internal fiber of her being screaming “no, this is wrong”, she smiled and said nothing because she needed to make \$52.00 more in tips that night to be able to pay her rent. It is traumatic, it is demeaning, it is absolutely soul-crushing, and it is wrong.

It would be easy to pass the same bill you did last year, and it would be a wonderful and amazing thing for so many here in Vermont. However, since we are already at the table, why not try to make it even better by re-examining the tipped minimum wage as well as the subminimum wage for high school students, which I fear will incentivize dropping out of school for students in this state who are working and helping their families pay their bills.

Thank you for taking the time to address the minimum wage, 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. When we boost the minimum wage, the base level, we boost the economy and all workers. 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, helping us strengthen protections for workers and consumers in our state, and developing a true universal health care system that does not rely on a person’s employment circumstances to truly bridge the affordability gap that plagues many Vermonters today.

Thank you.