



## VERMONT NETWORK

**January 31, 2019**

**Senate Economic Development, Housing and General 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. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of S.23.

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.

A couple of weeks ago I testified on housing challenges that survivors in Vermont face. 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. I know that you have heard that would take \$22.40 an hour to afford a 2 bedroom home in Vermont. That's \$22.40 today, not \$15 in 2024. This raise is long over due.

Last year I met with a group of survivors- young mothers living in shelter. We were there to talk about employment. They were sharing their work experiences, their challenges now that they were single moms, and their hopes for the future. When talking about getting back into the work force they spoke of the challenges of working minimum wage- feeling under-valued and asking "Is it even worth it?" to work. Then one woman said very optimistically "I heard they just passed a bill to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour" and I had to tell them "Yes, they did. Everyone worked really hard on that bill but unfortunately the Governor vetoed it".

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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.



So, I wanted to say thank you for all of the work that you did last session to pass a minimum wage bill and thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. We also appreciate the attention paid to the potential impacts to families on the Child Care Financial Assistance Program. This is a vital resource for survivors with children. We were excited to see the Governor address this in his budget proposal and we will continue to work on advocating for the resources that are allocated to this program match the need.

The Vermont Network supports raising the minimum wage. This is an opportunity for Vermont to make real positive change in the lives of the most vulnerable in our state, and we support that change.