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March 11, 2014

Protect Working Families
Cosponsor S. 460, the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we encourage you to cosponsor S. 460, the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, introduced by Senator Tom Harkin (D. Iowa). The bill is a common sense reform that is a key part of the nation's economic recovery and is needed more than ever to address the shift toward low-wage jobs for working families.

The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 takes necessary steps to help working families make ends meet, sustain consumer spending, and spur economic recovery. The bill would raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 by 2016, in three increments of 95 cents each. Further, the bill would adjust the minimum wage each year to keep pace with the rising cost of living. Finally, the bill would also raise the minimum wage for tipped workers, which has been frozen at a meager \$2.13 per hour for more than 20 years. These changes will make a significant difference in the lives of millions of low-wage workers and their families and help grow our economy.

A raise in the minimum wage is desperately needed because pay for America's workers remains stagnant, while the cost of living continues to rise. In 2007, Congress raised the federal minimum wage by \$2.10 per hour to \$7.25 as a first step toward achieving its purpose as an anti-poverty measure. Had the federal minimum wage kept pace with the cost of living over the past 40 years, it would be more than \$10.55 per hour today.¹ Instead, the current hourly rate of \$7.25 translates to an annual income of just \$15,080 per year for full-time work, which is below the poverty line for a family of three.

Raising the minimum wage is a civil rights imperative. Providing America's lowest paid workers with a raise is a critical civil and human rights issue given the impact it would have on women, African Americans, Latinos, and other minority populations, including the Native American, AAPI, LGBT, and disability communities, whose poverty rates are also disproportionately high. Women and communities of color are disproportionately represented among the 30 million Americans who will benefit from a higher minimum wage.² According to the Economic Policy Institute:

- Women comprise 49 percent of U.S. workers, yet make up 56 percent of workers who would be affected by a potential minimum-wage increase.³
- African Americans make up only 11 percent of the workforce, but are 14 percent of those that would benefit from a higher minimum wage.⁴
- Hispanics represent only 15 percent of the workforce, yet comprise 25 percent of those that would benefit from a higher minimum wage.⁵

Raising the minimum wage would generate economic activity. Minimum wage increases stimulate the economy by increasing consumer spending, without adding to state and federal budget deficits. Raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour would generate \$22 billion in new economic activity in communities across the country.⁶ Despite fears about the adverse effect of a minimum wage increase on businesses, studies demonstrate that when the minimum wage has been increased, there has been no significant reduction in employment or slowing of job growth, even when the economy was struggling.⁷ Strengthening the minimum wage can help build a sustainable economic recovery—without increasing costs for taxpayers.

Raising the minimum wage does not cause job loss. The best economic research and real world experiences with minimum wage increases confirm that raising the minimum wage does not cause job loss. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, which reviewed the past two decades of research on the impact of minimum wage increases on employment, “the weight of the evidence points to little or no effect of minimum wage increases on job growth.”⁸ A recent Congressional Budget Report contradicts overwhelming evidence demonstrating that raising the federal minimum wage will actually improve our economy and create jobs.⁹ The experience of businesses and scholarly studies show that what companies lose when they pay more is often offset by lower turnover and increased productivity.¹⁰

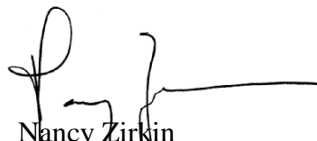
Raising the minimum wage has public support. Raising the minimum wage has received broad support. Overall, 73 percent of the public favors raising the federal minimum wage from its current level of \$7.25 an hour to \$10.10 an hour.¹¹ Further, states around the country are enacting minimum wage hikes. Twenty-one states and the District of Columbia have raised their minimum wages higher than the current federal rate of \$7.25 per hour and legislation to raise and/or index the minimum wage has been introduced in several states.¹² The American economy needs a strong national wage floor to protect workers in all regions of the country.

Setting the minimum wage at an appropriate level can promote economic growth while strengthening the ability of low- and middle-wage workers to have quality jobs. We urge you to cosponsor the Fair Minimum Wage Act, which will help provide America’s lowest paid workers with an urgently needed raise while boosting the consumer spending that fuels the economy. To co-sponsor, please contact Liz Weiss in Sen. Harkin’s office at liz_weiss@help.senate.gov or (202) 224-5441. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lexer Quamie, Senior Counsel at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights at quamie@civilrights.org or (202) 466-3648. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President

¹ See <http://www.raisetheminimumwage.com/facts/entry/amount-with-inflation/> for calculation.

² Mishel, Lawrence, Declining value of the federal minimum wage is a major factor Driving Inequality, Feb. 21, 2013. <http://www.epi.org/publication/declining-federal-minimum-wage-inequality/>

³ Hall, Doug and David Cooper, A \$10.10 Minimum Wage Would Give Economy (and More Low-Wage Workers) a Bigger Boost, March 5, 2013. <http://www.epi.org/blog/10-10-minimum-wage-give-economy-wage-workers/>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Cooper, David. EPI Briefing Paper, Raising the Minimum Wage to \$10.10 Would Lift Wages for Millions and Provide a Modest Economic Boost. <http://s1.epi.org/files/2014/EPI-1010-minimum-wage.pdf>

⁷ Schmitt, John “Why Does the Minimum Wage Have no Discernible Effect on Employment,” Center for Economic and Policy Research, Feb. 2013. <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/min-wage-2013-02.pdf>

⁸ Why does the Minimum Wage Have No Discernible Effect on Employment? <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/min-wage-2013-02.pdf>

⁹ The effect of raising the minimum wage is one of the most thoroughly studied topics in modern economics, and the vast majority of the more than 1,000 estimates contained in studies dating back to 1972 show no significant adverse effects on employment. In fact, more than 600 prominent economists, including 7 Nobel laureates, have signed a letter in support of raising the federal minimum wage. *See* <http://www.epi.org/minimum-wage-statement/>

¹⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/opinion/business-and-the-minimum-wage.html?hpw&rref=opinion&_r=0

¹¹ <http://www.people-press.org/2014/01/23/most-see-inequality-growing-but-partisans-differ-over-solutions/>

¹² <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wage-chart.aspx>