



April 30, 2015

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**Protect Working Families:  
Cosponsor the Raise the Wage Act**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national civil rights organizations, we encourage you to cosponsor the Raise the Wage Act introduced by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) today. The bill offers much-needed reforms to the federal minimum wage that would boost pay for more than 37 million Americans. These reforms are needed now more than ever as an increasing number of jobs shift towards low-wage employment for working families.

The Leadership Conference believes that passage of the Raise the Wage Act is a matter of basic fair play for our nation. The current federal minimum wage bill is 24 percent below its 1968 level despite the fact that 1) American workers have more than doubled their productivity in that same time period and 2) low-wage workers today possess more experience and education than they did in 1968.<sup>1</sup> **Almost half of those making less than \$15 an hour are age 35 and older<sup>2</sup>--these are older Americans trying to raise and support families on the minimum wage. In fact, more than two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women.<sup>3</sup>** Many of the communities that The Leadership Conference represents are the most directly affected by wage stagnation and have been harmed by our government's failure to set an adequate federal minimum wage. Providing America's lowest paid workers with fair wages 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, Asian Pacific American, LGBT, and disability communities, whose poverty rates are also disproportionately high.

The proposed legislation would take critical steps to help the working poor make ends meet, sustain consumer spending, and spur economic recovery. The Raise the Wage Act focuses on three key items. First, it would raise the federal minimum wage to \$12.00 by 2020 (by \$0.75 to \$8.00 an hour the first year, then in annual increments of a dollar each year for the next four years). Second, the bill would set automatic increases beginning in 2021 to keep pace with rising wages overall. Finally, the Raise the Wage Act would gradually phase out the subminimum wage for tipped workers, which has been frozen at an astonishing \$2.13 per hour for more than 20 years. According to the Economic Policy Institute, tipped workers in

<sup>1</sup> *Low-Wage Workers Have Far More Education Than They Did in 1968, Yet They Make Far Less*, by Lawrence Mishel, Economic Policy Institute, January 23, 2014. <http://www.epi.org/publication/wage-workers-education-1968/>

<sup>2</sup> *The Growing Movement for \$15*, by Irene Tung, Yannet Lanthrop, and Paul Sonn, National Employment Law Project, April 2015. <http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/Growing-Movement-for-15-Dollars.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *An Uneven Playing Field: America's Gender-Based Wage Gap, Binds of Discrimination, and a Path Forward*, National Partnership for Women & Families, April 2015. <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/an-uneven-playing-field-americas-gender-based-wage-gap-binds-of-discrimination-and-a-path-forward.pdf>

states with a subminimum wage for workers are two times more likely to live in poverty than the non-tipped workforce. Women once again are disproportionately impacted, as two-thirds of tipped wage workers are women. When enacted, together these changes will make a significant difference in the lives of millions of low-wage workers and their families. And the nation supports such action. According to a national poll released in January 2015, 75 percent of Americans across demographic lines are in favor of raising the federal minimum wage to over \$12 per hour.<sup>4</sup>

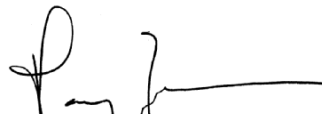
Finally, raising the minimum wage would not only help low-wage workers, it would also help grow our economy by generating much needed economic activity as the economy continues to recover. Minimum wage increases stimulate the economy by increasing consumer spending, without adding to state and federal budget deficits. Raising the federal minimum wage gradually to \$12 per hour would lead to over \$100 billion in increased earnings over the next five years, which will benefit local communities and businesses that depend on consumer spending. 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.<sup>5</sup> Strengthening the minimum wage can help build a sustainable economic recovery—without increasing costs for taxpayers.

The time to act is now—our families deserve nothing less. We urge you to cosponsor the Raise the 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. If you have any questions, please contact Emily Chatterjee, Senior Counsel at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at (202) 466-3648. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President

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<sup>4</sup> "New Poll Shows Overwhelming Support for Substantial Minimum Wage Increase," by Mitchell Hirsch, Raise the Minimum Wage, January 15, 2015. <http://www.raisetheminimumwage.com/blog/entry/new-poll-shows-overwhelming-support-for-substantial-minimum-wage-increase/>

<sup>5</sup> *Why Does the Minimum Wage Have No Discernible Effect on Employment*, by John Schmitt, Center for Economic and Policy Research, February 2013. <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/min-wage-2013-02.pdf>