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## Vote Recommendation: Support the Raise the Wage Act of 2019

July 15, 2019

Dear Representative:

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 write to express our strong support for the Raise the Wage Act of 2019 (H.R. 582). This important legislation would gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025, index it to median federal wages, and ensure that all tipped workers, working people with disabilities, and young people get paid at least the full minimum wage. **Passage of the Raise the Wage Act is a [top legislative priority](#) of our coalition. We urge you to vote YES on final passage of a clean bill and NO on any Motion to Recommit (MTR) in connection with this legislation. The Leadership Conference will score both of these votes in our voting record for the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.**

At the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, one of the founders of The Leadership Conference, Black labor leader A. Philip Randolph, noted, “Nor is the goal of our civil rights revolution merely the passage of civil rights legislation. Yes, we want all public accommodations open to all citizens, but those accommodations will mean little to those who cannot afford to use them.”

This week, the House of Representatives has the opportunity to champion working people by passing the Raise the Wage Act of 2019. In February 2019, I testified at a hearing held by the U.S. House Committee on Education & Labor entitled “Gradually Raising the Minimum Wage to \$15: Good for Workers, Good for Businesses, and Good for the Economy.” What I [said](#) then remains true today: low-wage working people are overdue for a raise. For decades, wages for most people in America have stagnated while productivity has increased. This has been particularly true for low-wage earners. Congress has not raised the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour since 2007. And the tipped minimum wage has been stuck at \$2.13 an hour since 1991.

Raising the federal minimum wage is a racial and gender justice issue. The National Women’s Law Center has noted that women make up nearly two-thirds of those earning the

federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour.<sup>1</sup> Women of color are more likely than any other group to be paid the lowest wages.<sup>2</sup>

Paying tipped workers the full minimum wage would rectify longstanding injustices and ensure that no one works for pennies in America. The subminimum wage that tipped workers receive is rooted in the history of slavery.<sup>3</sup> The practice of tipping proliferated in the United States after the Civil War when the restaurant and hospitality industry, exemplified by the Pullman Company, “hired” newly freed slaves without paying them base wages.<sup>4</sup> The effect was to create a permanent servant class, for whom the responsibility of paying a wage was shifted from employers to customers.<sup>5</sup> Today, poverty rates for people who work for tips are more than twice as high as rates for working people overall – with female tipped workers, especially women of color, at a particular disadvantage.<sup>6</sup> According to the 2012-2015 ACS data on gender and race for tipped occupations, of the almost 6 million tipped working people in our country, 66 percent are women.<sup>7</sup> And women of color are disproportionately represented in the tipped workforce.

As with the tipped minimum wage, the subminimum wage under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act that allows people with disabilities working in segregated settings to be paid less than the minimum wage leaves this community vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. The National Disability Rights Network believes that “sheltered workshops have replaced institutions in many states as the new warehousing system and are the new favored locations where people with disabilities are sent to occupy their days.”<sup>8</sup> Enacted in 1938, Section 14(c) reflects what should be a bygone era of how we as a nation treat people with disabilities. The time has come for federal action to support and fully integrate people with disabilities into the workplace.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recently released a report looking at the potential effects of increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour incrementally through 2025 and found that the benefits strongly outweigh its costs. The CBO report predicted that this gradual increase would decrease the number of individuals living in poverty by 1.3 million people and disproportionately increase the incomes of families that are low-income.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vogtman, Julie. “The Raise the Wage Act: Boosting Women’s Paychecks and Advancing Equal Pay.” *National Women’s Law Center*. May 2017. Available at <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-raise-the-wage-act-boosting-womens-paychecks-and-advancing-equal-pay/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Azar, Ofer H. “The history of tipping—from sixteenth-century England to United States in the 1910s.” *The Journal of Socio-Economics*. Vol. 33, Issue 6. Pgs. 745-764. December 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Bates, B.T. *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945*. The University of North Carolina Press. 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Paarlberg, Michael and Teofilo Reyes. “Paying tipped workers better wouldn’t lead to fewer restaurant jobs.” *The Washington Post*. January 16, 2018. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/01/16/paying-tipped-workers-better-wouldnt-lead-to-fewer-restaurant-jobs/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Raise the Wage: Women Fare Better in States with Equal Treatment for Tipped Workers.” *National Women’s Law Center and Restaurant Opportunities Centers United*. Oct. 17, 2016. Available at <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Tipped-Wage-10.17.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> 2012-2015 ACS data on gender and race for tipped occupations, ipums.org.

<sup>8</sup> “Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work.” *National Disability Rights Network*. 2011. For an update on what states are doing to more effectively integrate workers with disabilities into competitive employment see “Beyond Segregated and Exploited: Update on the Employment of People with Disabilities.” *National Disability Rights Network*. April 2012. Available at [http://www.ndrn.org/images/Documents/Resources/Publications/Reports/Beyond\\_Segregated\\_and\\_Exploited.pdf](http://www.ndrn.org/images/Documents/Resources/Publications/Reports/Beyond_Segregated_and_Exploited.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Congressional Budget Office. “The Effects of on Employment and Family Income of Increasing the Federal Minimum Wage.” July 2019. Available at <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2019-07/CBO-55410-MinimumWage2019.pdf>

The civil rights community has long supported a universal floor for wages that would provide a base line for all people in our country. Indeed, one of the core demands of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was for “[a] national *minimum wage* that will give all Americans a decent standard of living.”<sup>10</sup> Cost of living data show that in all 50 states today a single working person without children currently needs or will soon need a wage of at least \$15 per hour to cover basic living costs.<sup>11</sup> Working people with children and those in high-cost states will need even more.

Fair wages are essential for working people to cover basic expenses like housing, food, transportation, childcare, health care, and other necessities. We urge you to vote for clean passage of the Raise the Wage Act of 2019 – and against any MTR that is offered – to address the economic security concerns of working families. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Emily Chatterjee at [chatterjee@civilrights.org](mailto:chatterjee@civilrights.org).

Sincerely,



Vanita Gupta  
President and CEO

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<sup>10</sup> March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Lincoln Memorial Program. August 28, 1963. Available at <https://www.crmvet.org/docs/mowprog.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Owens, Christine. “Regional approach to federal minimum wage would keep wages artificially low in many parts of U.S.” *National Employment Law Project*. April 4, 2019. Available at <https://www.nelp.org/news-releases/regional-approach-federal-minimum-wage-keep-wages-artificially-low-many-parts-u-s/>.