



Oregon School Employees Association

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Senate Workforce and House Business and Labor Committees Testimony in Support of SB 610 and HB 2009

Submitted by Tim Stoelb, President of the Oregon School Employees Association

Chairs and members of the committees, on behalf of the 20,000 members of the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA), I urge you to support SB 610 and HB 2009, increasing Oregon's minimum wage to \$15 over several years.

OSEA represents education employees in 141 local chapters throughout the state with members in every senate and house district. The majority of our members are classified support personnel who have been dramatically affected over the past 11 years by back-to-back economic recessions. Work hours have been reduced, wages have declined, jobs have been unnecessarily outsourced and, in many cases, positions have been outright eliminated due to education budget cuts. The workload in our education system has not changed over these years and the employees that were left to pick up the slack did so without additional compensation. For many, not only did they endure frozen wages and increased work-related stress, but they also had to face increased costs for basic family necessities.

Without a livable wage, our members are forced into making the decision to continue working at a job they love that provides a huge value to the quality of education our children get and paying bills. In some cases, our members work multiple jobs and still must rely on government assistance to make ends meet due to low wages and family composition. It is a tragedy our public employees are even in these situations.

A January 2015 report by The Oregon Center for Public Policy indicates our state economy has grown three times faster than the U.S. economy over the past 13 years. This report also noted, during this same time, most Oregonians have been left behind with soaring income inequality and stagnant wages for the workers that are creating and supporting this economic growth. It is time to correct this inequity.

Paying workers a livable minimum wage is good public policy which has a positive impact on the education of children and retention of good workers. A livable minimum wage lifts families and the community at large out of poverty. Paying a livable minimum wage allows employers to better retain their skilled and trained work force and avoid retraining costs. A livable minimum wage allows employees to spend more which benefits business.

Leaving our minimum wage as it currently stands makes no sense. Right now, Oregon is allowing businesses to pay poverty wages and reap the rewards. This business welfare model must stop. It's time to outlaw poverty.

Several OSEA members are scheduled to share written and oral testimony on SB 610 and HB 2009 with you. I implore you to listen to their stories and the challenges they have had to face. These are the dedicated professionals who educate our children. They certainly do not do it for the money; they do their jobs because they love what they do. They should not have to struggle in poverty to survive.

I urge you to support SB 610 and HB 2009.