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OREGON

Smart policies for today's families.

June 17, 2015

Testimony in Support of Raising the Minimum Wage
Submitted by Andrea Paluso, Family Forward Oregon

Chair Hoyle and Members of the House Rules Committee,

My name is Andrea Paluso and I'm the Executive Director of Family Forward Oregon. We are an organization committed to advancing policies that support families and help them succeed, both in the workplace and at home. Our mission is to create a family-forward Oregon where all families can be economically secure and have the time it takes for work and family responsibilities. Today, too many families are forced to sacrifice one or the other. Family Forward supports policies, like raising the minimum wage, that make economic stability and work-life balance more achievable for Oregon families.

Oregon has a rich history of being a forerunner in minimum wage legislation. A little over 100 years ago, Oregon became one of the first states to enact a minimum wage law, intended to provide a "living wage" for women. While we have made some progress over the years, Oregon's minimum wage is still a far cry from a living wage for anyone. Today people working at minimum wage full-time will make \$19,240 a year and still qualify for public assistance that offsets their poverty-level wages. We need a higher minimum wage for all Oregonians but also must recognize that in different parts of the state it costs more to live. Those differences should be reflected in the policy we create, by allowing cities and counties to build on minimum standards.

The average minimum wage worker in our country is most likely to be a 35-year-old woman.¹ She's also likely to have a family that relies on her income to survive. Indeed, almost two-thirds of women in the U.S. are the primary or co-breadwinners in their families. American families increasingly rely on the income earned by women.

In Oregon, 60 percent of all minimum wage workers are women. They are cleaning offices, working in restaurants, and providing care for children and older people all while trying to keep their families financially afloat. These economic struggles are more acute for women without a partner's income to rely on. Of the 166,000 households in our state led by single women, one in three live below the federal poverty line.² When women make poverty wages, they face not

¹ Economic Policy institute. *Low-wage workers are Older Than You Think: 88 Percent of Workers who Would Benefit from a higher Minimum Wage are Older Than 20, One Third are over 40.* Available from: <http://www.epi.org/publication/wage-workers-older-88-percent-workers-benefit/>

² U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, three-year estimates 2010-2012. From Labor Education and Research Center, University of Oregon. (January 2015) *The High Cost of Low Wages in Oregon*, available at: <http://lerc.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2014-Oregon-Workforce-Report-The-High-Cost-of-Low-Wages-in-Oregon.pdf>



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being able to afford the skyrocketing cost of childcare, food, and rent - let alone save for their or their children's future.

Women still face wage inequality and earn lower wages than their male counterparts. Many factors contribute to the wage gap, including lack of access to paid sick days, gender discrimination and the over-representation of women in low-wage jobs and sectors. Currently women in Oregon, on average, make 82 cents on the male dollar but for women of color, the wage gap is even wider: African American women nationally make only 64 cents, and Hispanic women only 56 cents, for every dollar paid to white men.³ Women of color are more likely than white women to work in low-wage jobs and increasing the minimum wage would help more women and families who are currently living at the brink of poverty to afford a better quality of life. Raising the minimum wage in Oregon is an important and necessary step in advancing economic security for working families and helping women work their way out of poverty.

It has been a hundred years since paying women any amount less than the minimum wage was “declared inadequate to supply the necessary cost of living to such women... and maintain them in health”. Now that hundreds of thousands of women are earning the minimum wage and still not getting by, it's time that all families are paid wages that allow them to afford the basics: housing, child care, groceries. Too many of our community members are working too hard and relying on insufficient income to feed their families, clothe their children, and, most importantly, to live free from constant fear and worry about their future.

We support a higher minimum wage for Oregon and repealing the preemption on local jurisdictions enacting their own wage standards.

³ National Women's Law Center. *Insecure and Unequal: Poverty Among Women & Families 2000-2013*. Available from: <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/insecure-unequal-poverty-and-income-among-women-and-families-2000-2013>.