

House Rules Committee

HB 2012

June 17, 2015

Madam Chair and members of the committees:

My name is Cynthia Munoz and I am a classified employee, an education assistant, who would benefit greatly by having a significant raise in the minimum wage.

I have been a classified employee for 5 years first in the Beaverton school district, and currently in the West-Linn Wilsonville School District and love what I do. I work on bettering our country's future every day. I teach children to not only read and do mathematics, but to think critically, question, and analyze those two subjects. I conduct small reading groups to build vocabulary, fluency, and understanding of texts. I also help struggling mathematicians to understand materials. More importantly, I build community with my students, and between them. My students make what I do a joy.

I am here to present my current story of struggle, while having the tools that are considered necessary to succeed. Growing up, I was sold the idea that education would be the key to having a successful career. I want to pass on that same wisdom to our future. Earning a degree would be my way into the middle class.

That is the reason that I put myself through college as a single mother. I currently have a Bachelors of Science in Liberal Arts, which is what is recommended for teaching: a strong background in science and math, and a lot of humanities, English and the arts in general.

When I graduated in 2012, I was very proud of myself. I was told my earned diploma was going to pull my son and I up and out of poverty. Currently I earn just under \$13 an hour as an education assistant, but I also take odd jobs to supplement, like dance instructor, tutor, and translator. I earned just under \$18,000 last year. That is \$3,000 over the federal poverty guidelines according to the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

But these guidelines are a technicality. Monthly this income translates into being able to afford \$500 for rent (always with a roommate), \$250 for groceries, \$250 in utilities, \$250 for my car payment and insurance, leaving \$250 for gas, parking for school, and anything that comes up.

Behind the scenes, I have medical bills piling up from a car crash in 2012 I was a passenger in, for which I have not been able to give a single payment. That debt has been collecting and is getting larger and larger. My student loans have been patiently waiting with me for a living wage, so for now I am okay in that realm. In December, my car was repossessed with only 4 payments left on it. I had to borrow my sister's minivan for a couple of months to be

able to drive to school and to work. I was lucky to receive a tax refund that let me purchase another vehicle. In my budget, I have no room for paying childcare. I am extremely lucky at the moment that my mother has moved close by and can watch my ten-year-old son. In past years, my son would come to work with me, spending up to twelve hours away from home and doing his homework quietly while mommy worked.

Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would mean a raise of \$2.29 an hour for me. It translates into \$150 a month increase to my income. This amount does not seem like much to those earning a living wage, but to someone like me, it is a breath of fresh air. It means I would not have to pick between groceries and gas at the end of the week, or maybe that I can turn up the heat to a cozy 70 degrees in the winter and not have to tell my son to wear a sweater indoors. It can mean more snacks in the cupboard, having only one job for once in my life, and even a trip to a fast food place as a treat for progress on his reading score. I could start paying my student loans, make my first payment on those medical bills, or I could afford to have a flat tire and replace it at any point. \$150 dollars are precious when you are just scraping by. They fill the financial holes that any emergency can open up, like my car breaking down in the parking lot of my work place (the tow truck is very expensive and I found out the hard way).

Personally, I still feel that education is the key to “making it.” After two years of searching for a position that would offer me a living wage without any luck, I have gone back to pursue graduate school.

I still consider myself very privileged. There are so many others that cannot be here today to speak for themselves. I am not earning minimum wage. There are so many families that earn a wage that I would have to work miracles to be able to feed myself with, much less a child or family. I am in deep admiration of them. I am here not only to advocate for myself but for those that literally could not attend. Not showing up to work is a life or death situation for many I know personally. When raising a family, \$15 an hour is still meager wages, but it is a good start.

Thank you so much for you time and the work that you do. I trust that you will take all those that could not be present into consideration in your decision making process.

Cynthia Munoz