

Testimony for Minimum Wage

Sarah Benesi

Portland, Maine

About a year after I graduated from college, I scored a job at a bakery. It didn't correlate with my career plans, though I felt fortunate to earn \$15 an hour with guaranteed thirty hours a week. I recall fantasizing about the adventures I'd embark upon with my newfound wealth. With my first paycheck, I realized the bleak reality of \$15 an hour.

After subtracting my rent, food, and other necessities, I found myself in the red each month. I inquired about more hours at the bakery; my supervisor informed me that she couldn't permit this as our leadership team capped us at thirty-five hours a week. If we clocked out a minute over that, we'd legally transition to full-time employees, a distinction that would include benefits and the company "couldn't afford" to allocate funds for health insurance for all of its employees.

If I fell ill, even with an illness as relatively benign as the flu, I couldn't afford rent. I couldn't miss a single day. I woke each morning with a panic in my chest. I felt as though I walked my days along a razor's edge.

So I found a second job, this one earning me roughly \$13 an hour. I calculated that I'd need to work twenty hours there, plus the thirty at the bakery, in order to break even. These calculations failed to include my student loans — I could afford rent or loans, and I opted for a roof over my head. I deferred my loans for years, during which time I accrued thousands of dollars of interest.

This all occurred in 2011 — thirteen years ago. If we adjust my \$15 for inflation, today I'd earn about \$20 an hour. I only needed to provide for myself and my earnings still weren't enough. I

cannot imagine supporting myself and a family. I don't know I'd do it. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 is not enough but it's a start. It's a start to help more Mainers survive and feed their children. It's a start to support the local economy with increased funds. This isn't a situation of us versus them, the haves versus have nots. It's about all of us.

Last year the legislature voted to raise the minimum wage. Now is time to enact it in the budget. Let's offer more families a fighting chance. Thank you.

Sarah Benesi
Portland
LD 2214

About a year after I graduated from college, I scored a job at a bakery. It didn't correlate with my career plans, though I felt fortunate to earn \$15 an hour with guaranteed thirty hours a week. I recall fantasizing about the adventures I'd embark upon with my newfound wealth. With my first paycheck, I realized the bleak reality of \$15 an hour.

After subtracting my rent, food, and other necessities, I found myself in the red each month. I inquired about more hours at the bakery; my supervisor informed me that she couldn't permit this as our leadership team capped us at thirty-five hours a week. If we clocked out a minute over that, we'd legally transition to full-time employees, a distinction that would include benefits and the company "couldn't afford" to allocate funds for health insurance for all of its employees.

If I fell ill, even with an illness as relatively benign as the flu, I couldn't afford rent. I couldn't miss a single day. I woke each morning with a panic in my chest. I felt as though I walked my days along a razor's edge.

So I found a second job, this one earning me roughly \$13 an hour. I calculated that I'd need to work twenty hours there, plus the thirty at the bakery, in order to break even. These calculations failed to include my student loans — I could afford rent or loans, and I opted for a roof over my head. I deferred my loans for years, during which time I accrued thousands of dollars of interest.

My situation wasn't nearly as dire as it is for many. I could rely upon my family if I found myself in trouble; I could move home and save money at any time.

This all occurred in 2011 — thirteen years ago. If we adjust my \$15 for inflation, today I'd earn about \$20 an hour. I only needed to provide for myself and my earnings still weren't enough. I cannot imagine supporting myself and a family. I don't know I'd do it. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 is not enough but it's a start. It's a start to help more Mainers survive and feed their children. It's a start to support the local economy with increased funds. This is not a situation of us versus them, the haves versus have nots. It's about all of us.

Last year the legislature voted to raise the minimum wage. Now is time to enact it in the budget. Let's offer more families a fighting chance. Thank you.