

CT Low Wage Employer Advisory Board Meeting

April 21, 2016 – 3:00 P.M.

CT Department of Labor – Wethersfield Central Office

Conference Rooms A & B

Minutes

Members present: Co-Chair Jamie Mills, Co-Chair James Bhandary-Alexander, Susan Coleman, Stanley McMillen, Michael Seid, Helene Figueroa, Kurt Westby, Merrill Gay, Deborah Schwartz, Paul Lavoie and Merle Berkle-Schlessel (new member).

Members absent: Eddie Stephens

Other Attendees: CT Department of Labor (DOL) staff Michael Bartley and Christopher Caruso, SEIU Executive Director Paul Filson and SEIU Economic Issues Policy Director Audrey Richardson.

Introductions and Swearing In of New Members:

Co-Chair Bhandary-Alexander convened the meeting at 3:09 P.M. Following the introduction of Board members and staff, Co-Chair Mills officially swore in Merle Berkle-Schlessel as a new member of the Board.

Approval of Board Minutes:

A motion was made by Susan Coleman and seconded by Stanley McMillen to approve the minutes of the March 8, 2016 Board meeting. **There being no corrections, the motion passed with Merle Berkle-Schlessel abstaining.**

Discussion and Acceptance of the Meeting Agenda:

The proposed “Interim Board Report” prepared by Deborah Schwartz was extensively discussed. As a result, a motion was made by Helene Figueroa and seconded by Michael Seid to form a working group comprised of Board members Michael Seid, Stanley McMillen, Susan Coleman and Deborah Schwartz. The group is to review the report and if necessary, make revisions. The report must then be forwarded to the Co-Chairs no later than April 28, 2016. The Co-Chairs will then email the report to each Board member for their review and approval. If approved, the report will be disseminated to Legislative Leadership and State Commissioners. **The motion passed unanimously with no amendments.**

The Co-Chairs entertained discussion on the sharing of emails (articles, reports, opinions, etc.) between Board members. These emails have also been received by members of the public who requested their names be included on the Board's email distribution list. Michael Seid felt the emails may have been perceived as final Board action, by the public and legislators. Co-Chair Bhandary-Alexander informed the Board that he sent a clarification to all those on the email distribution list. At Michael Seid's request, he agreed to send a second notice.

Co-Chair Mills recommended that all future emails be marked as "**Draft - For Discussion Purposes Only.**" Further, to avoid confusion, she requested that all emails be sent to the Co-chairs for distribution to the Board. **There was agreement by the Board members.**

Even though all correspondence of the Board is open to the public and posted on the Board's webpage, Co-Chair Mills felt that emails between Board members should be limited to the members only. There was general agreement among the members, but discussion ensued around the Freedom of Information laws. For clarity, Kurt Westby stated that he has requested DOL Attorney Lane to review the applicable statutes, and within a few days provide the Board with a legal opinion.

Discussion on Current Legislative Proposals:

A copy of Senate Bill 391; An Act Concerning the Recoupment of State Costs Attributable to Low Wage Employers, was presented to the Co-Chairs by Deborah Schwartz for consideration and possible endorsement by the Board.

Helen Figueroa and Deborah Schwartz raised the importance of the proposed legislation and its effect on the well-being of thousands of low wage workers throughout the state. With less than two weeks left to the legislative session, Stanley McMillen and Susan Coleman felt there wasn't adequate time to thoroughly review the legislation in order to render an informed endorsement. Michael Seid repeatedly raised the question as to whether the Board has the authority to endorse legislation, and Merle Berkle-Schissel needed more information on the problem that is to be corrected by the legislation. **In the end, no vote was taken to endorse the legislation.**

Discussion on the December 1, 2016 Report to the Legislature:

Per statute, on December 1st the Board must report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature and State Commissioners. To this end, Co-Chair Bhandary-Alexander proposed that the Board's time and resources should be focused on the issue of raising the Minimum Wage, its effect on low wage workers, employers and other related subject matter. Co-Chair Mills agreed with the proposal. She stated that the Board is constituted by statute for up to four

years, and consideration of raising the Minimum Wage should be the priority for this year, while other issues can be considered in subsequent years.

Stanley McMillen stated there is much information on the Minimum Wage and related subject matter that the Board should consider for its December 1st report. He is in the process of gathering and reviewing reports from the Office of Policy and Management that he will share with the Board. Susan Coleman also felt that the Board needed to conduct a broad review of subject matter including how raising the Minimum Wage would affect employers.

Co-Chair Bhandary-Alexander entertained a motion from Merrill Gay that the Board in preparation of its December 1st report shall focus its work on the question of raising the Minimum Wage, its effect on low wage workers, employers and other related subject matter. Further, this action by the Board shall be made part of the Board's Interim Report. **The motion was seconded by Susan Coleman and passed unanimously with no amendments.**

To prepare for future meetings and presentations, Co-Chair Mills led a discussion on topics for Board consideration. Some items included:

- What is the CT workforce – (occupations, industry sectors, etc.)?
- Incidents of and alternatives to the Minimum Wage
- Impact of raising the Minimum Wage on low wage workers and employers
- Impact of childcare, homecare and other issues on low wage earners
- Review legislation from other states that have raised the Minimum Wage

Public Comment:

No member of the public addressed the Board.

Adjournment and Next Meeting:

A motion to adjourn was made by Deborah Schwartz and seconded by Kurt Westby. **The motion passed unanimously and the Board adjourned at 5:01 P.M.** The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 10th at 3:00 P.M. in Conference Room 1D of the Legislative Office Building in Hartford.

Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Caruso
CT Department of Labor

