

# **The CT Low Wage Employer Advisory Board Public Hearing**

July 20, 2016 – 6:00 P.M.

The City Council Chambers – City Hall  
45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut

## **Minutes**

**Members present:** Co-Chair Jamie Mills, Co-Chair James Bhandary-Alexander, Stanley McMillen, Michael Seid, Merrill Gay, Deborah Schwartz, Paul Lavoie, and Helene Figueroa. **A quorum of members present was reached.**

**Members absent:** Susan Coleman, Eddie Stephens, Kurt Westby (represented at the hearing by Marisa Morello from the CT Department of Labor), and Merle Berke-Schlessel.

**Other Attendees:** CT Department of Labor (CT DOL) staff Christopher Caruso, Kristina Stevenson and Dolores Ryan. Kristina and Dolores work at the American Job Center in Bridgeport, and Elizabeth Perez-Gonzalez from Career Resources, Inc. served as the Spanish speaking translator for the hearing.

With welcoming remarks and appreciation for the City's support in hosting the public hearing, Co-Chair Mills convened the hearing at 6:08 P.M. Co-Chair Bhandary-Alexander also welcomed the public in Spanish and announced that a Spanish speaking translator was available if needed. Co-Chair Mills informed the public that the Board received written testimony in email form which will be made part of the official record and posted on the Board's Webpage.

Approximately seventy-five members of the public attended the hearing with thirty individuals signing up to speak. Written testimony was received by a number of speakers, and will be posted on the Board's Webpage along with the official sign-in sheets for the hearing.

In summary, those speaking in favor of raising the Minimum Wage to \$15.00 an hour addressed a number of issues concerning their inability to financially support themselves and their families. Their quality of life is adversely affected. Their limited income is being used to pay for childcare, rent, transportation, food, and other necessities. Some work two to three jobs, and still cannot make ends meet. One woman said she had to return her daughter to Puerto Rico because she could no longer support her financially in Connecticut. The occupations of many of the speakers ranged from security guards to health care workers to low-wage workers at fast food restaurants. Several of the speakers traveled from various parts of the state including Hartford, New Britain, West Hartford and Canterbury. One worker claimed that she hasn't had a raise in over ten years. She works with clients with physical and mental disabilities.

Two speakers spoke in opposition to raising the Minimum Wage. One was a business owner, and the other was representing her employer. Both said they would definitely support raising the minimum wage if they could, but it would adversely affect their businesses ability to compete, and to keep up with ever rising costs associated with their industry. The speaker who owned his business provided a litany of companies that have left Connecticut because of the cost of doing business. He said many of the departing companies were former clients of his and the loss has adversely affected his business.

Senator Ed Gomes and Marilyn Moore of Bridgeport both spoke in favor of raising the Minimum Wage. To better understand the plight of a low-wage worker, Senator Moore personally applied for and worked at a national retail store for \$9.60 an hour. This experience has made her an ardent supporter of raising the Minimum Wage in Connecticut.

CT Voices for Children spoke in support of raising the Minimum Wage and presented excerpts from various reports in support of their argument. Co-Chair Mills asked the Board's staff to arrange a future presentation by the organization.

Interested in trying to improve the skill levels of low-wage workers to make them more competitive in the job market, Board member Michael Seid inquired as to what training and education would be required. By providing these opportunities, he felt low-wage workers could become more marketable for potential employers and as a result, their salaries would rise commensurately. Some of the speakers expressed passion about the work they were presently doing and uninterested in changing occupations.

The public hearing was taped by the Connecticut Television Network (CT-N) for broadcast.

**Adjournment and Next Meeting:**

After Co-Chair Mills thanked the public for their participation, a motion to adjourn was made by Paul Lavoie and seconded by Merrill Gay. **The motion passed unanimously and the public hearing was adjourned at 8:30 P.M.**

**The next scheduled meeting of the Board is Wednesday, August 10 at 3:00 P.M. in Hearing Room 1D of the Legislative Office Building, Hartford.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Christopher Caruso  
CT Department of Labor