

# Raise the Wage Talking Points:



## Overarching Frames:

- **Health/Well-being**
  - A \$15/hour minimum wage will make our communities, families, businesses and state healthier.
  - Ensuring that our lowest paid workers have enough money to provide for themselves and their families will make our families and communities healthier.
  - Livable wages for all working Vermonters will support the health and wellbeing of our communities.
- **Strong Economy**
  - Workers earning higher wages are better able to contribute to their local economies. Raising Vermonters wages will improve their purchasing power in our communities, which will bolster our small businesses and grow the economy.
  - A livable minimum wage boosts Vermont's economy and helps our communities thrive, which will attract new businesses and industries here.
  - Putting more money in people's pockets has a positive ripple effect on our State's economy. A higher minimum wage helps Vermont's small businesses' bottom line by giving them what they need most--customers.
- **Future**
  - Vermont's children deserve every opportunity to thrive. When parents earn more their children do better, with well-documented benefits to their children's health, educational outcomes and future earnings.
  - More than 43,000 Vermont children live in a household supported by someone earning less than \$15 per hour, and nearly 30,000 children live in a household supported by someone earning less than \$12 per hour. It's time to make sure every working parent is paid enough to care for their kids and set them off toward □a great future.

## Key Points:

- Vermont workers would benefit broadly from a phased-in \$15 minimum wage, which would raise pay by an average of \$2,000 a year<sup>(1)</sup> for more than three in 10 working Vermonters<sup>(2)</sup>.
- Vermont's poverty rate is 10.2%, or approximately 60,000 people<sup>(3)</sup>.
- Currently, the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 and VT's minimum wage is \$10.00. This will raise to \$10.50 in 2018, and beginning in 2019, the minimum wage will be indexed to inflation. If no action is taken, the minimum wage probably won't reach \$15/hr until the mid 2030s!
- According to the Economic Policy Institute's [Family Budget Calculator](#), a single adult (with no children at home), working full-time year-round in Vermont, would have to earn \$15.66/hr to achieve a modest but adequate standard of living. Therefore, it is critically important that we also address the benefits cliff and Vermont's Earned Income Tax Credit.

## Who does low-wage work:

- Of those who would receive a raise with a \$15 minimum wage, 87 percent are adults, 56 percent are women, 59 percent work full time, and one in five are parents. And on average they provide 63 percent of their total family income<sup>(4)</sup>.
- Women represent less than half of the workforce, but outnumber men when it comes to low wage work. Nearly half (45%) of all Vermont women are paid under \$15 per hour.
- Vermonters earning low wages work in mostly service related occupations, like food service, retail and health/personal care. Half of paramedics, pre-school teachers and nursing assistants are paid less than \$15/hr.
- Two-out-of-three (65%) of Vermonters who are paid less than \$12.50/hr are older than 30.
- Nearly half of all Vermonters in low-wage jobs have some level of college education, and more than 90% have a high school diploma.

### **Talking Points that may help you pivot from a “We just can’t afford it” argument:**

- Because so many working people are paid low wages, they must rely on public benefits to pay for the basics, taxpayers are subsidizing corporations that pay low-wages in the U.S. to the tune of \$1.7 billion every year.
- Jobs that provide low wages and no benefits place additional pressure on our social safety net, driving up costs for taxpayers and leaving families struggling just to get by.

### **Talking Points for Business Community:**

- Vermont’s local business owners share the same goals of all Vermonters: we want thriving communities that will keep Vermonters here in state and attract more families to move and stay here.
- Raising wages of everyday Vermonters enables them to better participate in our local economy, which will contribute to the health of Vermont’s small businesses.
- As wages increase, rates of turnover decrease -- investing in better wages improves morale and saves Vermont small business money associated with training and recruiting new employees.
- In 2014, the state that most often topped the list of small business job growth was Washington State — a state with one of the nation’s highest minimum wage. Raising the minimum wage creates jobs on Main Street and helps our communities to thrive.

### **Talking Points for Workers:**

- All working people in Vermont should be paid enough to care for and support their families.
- Too many working people are currently working 2-3 jobs, just to make ends meet. A full time job should pay enough to allow time for our families.
- Wages for workers in VT have not kept pace with increases in the cost of living. For minimum wage workers, this means that each year they are further away from being able to meet their basic needs.
- \$15/hour as a minimum by 2020 is a step towards everyone being able to meet their needs, but it is still not a livable wage in Vermont, particularly for workers with families to support. For that reason, we must also address Vermont’s Earned Income Tax Credit and smooth the “benefits cliff,” so families are actually seeing more money come in when the minimum wage is raised.

### **Talking Points for Faith Communities:**

- A moral economy honors the dignity of all people by ensuring that all work is justly valued.
- One of the most basic tenets of economic justice is fair wage for fair work. We believe that at a minimum, a fair wage includes provision for an adequate standard of living for a worker and her dependents, including: food, clothing, shelter, physical safety, basic health care and preventative care, including care for mental illness and security from fear of food scarcity.