



February 16, 2015

Re: Bills to raise the minimum wage (HB 1355), establish minimum standards for paid sick and safe time (HB 1356), and protect employees from retaliation (HB 1354)

Dear Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for working people to speak before your committee about why raising the minimum wage and creating a minimum standard for paid sick days is good for workers, good for communities, and good for the whole economy.

The testimony you hear today will offer some insight into what it's like to try and support yourself on a poverty-wage job. But a few minutes in a hearing room isn't enough to represent the experiences of the more than half-million people in our state who are paid poverty wages of less than \$15/hour, or the million workers who don't have paid sick days.

That's why we asked people across the state to answer a simple question:

**What's one thing you've done to make ends meet  
that state politicians don't know anything about?**

Here is a sampling some of the stories we received in just a few days:

*Lynn, Poulsbo:*

"When my kids were younger, I remember going into the basement and garage to **find unused outdoor light bulbs**, taking them back to a hardware store, using the cash to buy food. \$30. Now I'm on EBT."

*GG, Orting:*

"I'm unable to buy new tires that are really needed now. I've cut down on every basic need, no going out. **I can't buy the food I need** or get the eye and dental taken care of. You do without and hope you will still have a roof over your head."

*Dawn, Bremerton:*

"I consistently run 2 months behind on my electric, gas, and water. I have never seen a utility bill that was not past due... except for the very first one. **I shudder in fear every time I see a work truck for PSE** or Cascade Gas in my neighborhood. My gas gets shut off about once per year and I am forced to open a brand new account while the other goes into collections."

*Karen, Tacoma:*

"I listed **my belongings for sale** on OfferUp or craigslist."

*Laurel, Seattle:*

"On Wednesdays of each week I can go to Fred Meyer to check for any **almost out of date packages of meat** they are selling for two or three dollars less than their original price. If I wait till Thursday afternoon to go, it will usually be marked down a little bit more. I don't chance doing this with hamburger, but I buy most of my other meat this way. This is just one of the things we do to help decrease expenses."

*Jennifer, Auburn:*

"If I get sick, I have to call to in say I'm sick within a certain amount of time before my shift, and if I miss more than one day then I'm fired. The other issue is being a mother. If my children are sick, I can't call in sick to take care of them. **By the third day I would be fired.**"

*Nancy, Bellevue:*

"When I broke my wrist while doing company business, I had to keep working because I had no sick leave, etc. Because of that, **I'm on my third cast** because my wrist isn't healing — and I lost my job anyway."

*Becky, Bellingham:*

"I **stretch out my refills** of my prescription medications to make them last longer — take less than I'm supposed to."

*Bridgid, Seattle:*

"I went to college to become a professional landscaper. These days, I have to trade straight labor doing grounds maintenance because there isn't enough work to pay the rent (I'm lucky I had the foresight to buy my own tools, and that I have a landlord willing to do such a trade!), and in the winter I end up down to eating **beans and rice** to survive, like I have been for a month now. I won't go to the food bank except for in the most dire need because there are too many out there worse off than I am. Spring is coming, and then I'll have work again. I'm still strong, but I'm 53, and I don't know how much longer I can keep doing this."

*Jane, Richland:*

"I don't turn on **my furnace** for weeks at a time"

*Angeline, Seattle:*

"**I have been using food banks for over six years, now.** I went three years without a car, and spent **countless hours busing** around the Puget Sound, sometimes spending enough time traveling to make one wonder if it was a benefit to actually work. I can attest to it being exhausting, demoralizing, and isolating. I simply could not do more than make it to and from work, get errands done — so, another thing I do to make ends meet is **absent myself** from functions including religious services and social functions."

*Norman, Bremerton:*

"Many of us are working two jobs and trying to get an education at the same time. It will work if you are living with your parents. If your parents can't help, it is tough and many drop out of school perpetuating another generation living in poverty. Some of our politicians will argue they understand, because they were brought up poor. The reality is **16 hours a day, six days a week just for shelter and food**, and then try to get ahead. It doesn't work."

*James, Seattle:*

"I reduced **my food consumption** to one meal a day."

*JR, Orting:*

"I go without food choices I would like, turn the heat down, turn lights off, use less water, **do not go to the doctor** unless it is really need bad, walk when I can, drive with tires that need new ones, same with all car repairs, can not afford the dentist or new eye glasses that are needed for over two years already, no going out and you stop all extras. **Add water to shampoo**, less baths, wash clothes farther out. No vacations. No movies. No eating out. NO getting sick. Stop all driving unless it is to work. No shopping for any new clothes, underwear, socks, coats for winter, shoes, personal items."

*Zachary, Seattle:*

"I work at a private school and often times have to **go to the food bank across the street on lunch**. I work very hard on social work and barely make ends meet. My girlfriend and I would like to start a family, buy a house, and plan, but unfortunately we can't responsibly find a way to save for any of them."

*Robert, Port Orchard:*

"One of the things that my wife and I used to do to keep up with bills was to **use one credit card to pay another**. This is a trick that many struggling people use, and we were struggling at times because of surprise expenses. The difference an extra few dollars makes is critical."

*David, Edmonds:*

"My sister not only goes to the food bank – she **washes her clothes in her bathtub** to avoid paying a machine."

*Amber, Seattle:*

"I volunteer at a church on Wednesday nights to help with the Church dinner because they need the help AND I get to take home some of whatever is left over, which I eat all week. **This week it will be fried chicken and asparagus**, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday & hopefully through Monday."

*Elizabeth, confidential location:*

"On more than one occasion I have had to **scour the house to find enough change to go to the dollar store to buy toilet paper**. Such a simple item but without basic necessities being covered by food stamps and working for low wages despite having a bachelor's degree this is something my family has had to do to get by."

*Craig, Granite Falls:*

"I had to sell my DVDs to a pawn shop. My game systems, my books, records. Everything I accumulated from my childhood, just to make ends meet. I may never get all that back. The memories alone made me cry. I had no choice. **Pay bills or lose everything**. It's not fair, I work my ass off and **I lose my childhood over it**."

We hope you will consider the hundreds of thousands of people in our state with these kinds of experiences as you consider your vote on minimum wage, paid sick and safe time, and the employee antiretaliation act.

Sincerely,



Sejal Parikh, Executive Director  
Working Washington