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February 2, 2016

Testimony in Support of SB 1532-2: Raising the Minimum Wage
Senate Workforce Committee
Submitted by Andrea Paluso, Family Forward Oregon

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of raising the minimum wage. Family Forward is an organization committed to advancing policies that support families and helping them succeed, both in the workplace and at home. Our mission is to create a family-forward Oregon where all families can be economically secure and have the time it takes for work and family responsibilities. Today, too many families are forced to sacrifice one or the other. Family Forward supports policies, like raising the minimum wage, that make economic stability and work-life balance more achievable for Oregon families.

Oregon has a rich history of being a forerunner in minimum wage legislation. A little over 100 years ago, Oregon became one of the first states to enact a minimum wage law, intended to provide a "living wage" for women. While we have made some progress over the years, Oregon's minimum wage is still a far cry from a living wage for anyone. Today people working at minimum wage full-time will make \$19,240 a year and still qualify for public assistance that offsets their poverty-level wages.

We need a higher minimum wage for all Oregonians but also must recognize that in different parts of the state it costs more to live. Those differences should be reflected in the policy we create. We are in support of the -2 amendments because they better reflect the high cost of living in the Portland Metro area. The self-sufficiency wage for a household in Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington Counties is above \$20 per hour. A larger increase for workers in these areas is essential.

We are grateful that the Governor has continued to engage with stakeholders to refine her proposal and support the -2 amendments. Nonetheless, we would like to see an earlier increase in workers wages. The -1 amendments would provide a 50-cent increase to workers this July. Given that workers have not received an increase of this size in one year since 1997, and did not see an CPI increase this year, this component of the -1 amendments would get money into the pockets of workers faster, allowing them to afford more of the basics in 2016.

This is especially important for women and mothers. The average minimum wage worker in our country is most likely to be a 35-year-old woman.¹ She's also

¹ Economic Policy institute. *Low-wage workers are Older Than You Think: 88 Percent of Workers who Would Benefit from a higher Minimum Wage are Older Than 20, One Third are over 40.* Available from: <http://www.epi.org/publication/wage-workers-older-88-percent-workers-benefit/>



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likely to have a family that relies on her income to survive. Indeed, almost two-thirds of women in the U.S. are the primary or co-breadwinners in their families. American families increasingly rely on the income earned by women.

In Oregon, 60 percent of all minimum wage workers are women. They are cleaning offices, working in restaurants, and providing care for children and older people all while trying to keep their families financially afloat. These economic struggles are more acute for women without a partner's income to rely on. Of the 166,000 households in our state led by single women, one in three live below the federal poverty line.² When women make poverty wages, they face not being able to afford the skyrocketing cost of childcare, food, and rent - let alone save for their or their children's future. Raising the minimum wage in Oregon is an important and necessary step in advancing economic security for working families and helping women work their way out of poverty.

It has been a hundred years since paying women any amount less than the minimum wage was "declared inadequate to supply the necessary cost of living to such women... and maintain them in health". Now that hundreds of thousands of women are earning the minimum wage and still not getting by, it's time, in 2016, that all families are paid wages that allow them to afford the basics: housing, child care, groceries. Too many of our community members are working too hard and relying on insufficient income to feed their families, clothe their children, and, most importantly, to live free from constant fear and worry about their future. And while we support the minimum wage ballot measures, we hope the legislature provides working Oregonians with the long overdue raise they deserve.

²U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, three-year estimates 2010-2012. From Labor Education and Research Center, University of Oregon. (January 2015) *The High Cost of Low Wages in Oregon.*, available at: <http://lerc.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2014-Oregon-Workforce-Report-The-High-Cost-of-Low-Wages-in-Oregon.pdf>