

February 15, 2016

To: House Business and Labor Committee
From: Armond Foster
Re: Support of SB 1532A

Chair Holvey, members of the committee,

My name is Armond Foster. I have worked with developmentally disabled adults for 13 years. The people I work with are the most vulnerable population; many of them have no family to advocate for them. In a way staff becomes their family. We take care of all of their needs from hygiene, to medical, to getting them active in the community. Many group homes start pay at \$10 an hour and offer no benefits.

I and most of my coworkers have to work second jobs just to get by. This means you don't have the time or energy to do the things, like go to school, that could potentially pull you out of poverty. This work is often challenging and not everyone is able to do it. The people I've gotten to know in this field are probably the most selfless people I've ever known.

Unfortunately this work is undervalued in our society. Living on these kinds of wages means I am constantly juggling bills and falling behind. I live in a state of anxiety knowing I am one paycheck away from being homeless. When I'm constantly behind on bills I don't have money to do the things that make me happy like go to the movies or to lunch with a friend or for the tools and supplies I need to do the art I love.

If you work full time you shouldn't struggle to put groceries in the fridge and keep a roof over your head. Imagine that sense of insecurity in your life. When I'm sick I can barely pay the copay and god forbid I required on going treatment. I had to stay in an unhealthy relationship for years simply because I didn't have the money to move. With the cost of living rising so drastically in Portland and having no cap on rental increases it has become truly scary. I fear the day I come home to a no cause eviction notice or a 50% rent increase and have no savings to move.

To me the true meaning of a welfare state is that Companies are able to pay their employees unlivable wages so that their profit margins are bigger and their employees therefor have to rely on public assistance that is paid for from all of our taxes. \$14.75 an hr may sound like a large raise in the minimum wage but over six years it is essentially a cost of living raise. You have the power to raise the minimum wage which would directly and immediately improve the quality of life for so many people.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate the opportunity to share my story.