



February 15, 2016

Representative Paul Holvey, Chair
Members of the House Committee on Business and Labor
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Ritter, and I am a board member of Children First for Oregon. I am also an Associate Professor of Social Work at Pacific University Oregon. Children First wants Oregon to be **the best place to be a kid**. We strive to make change by advocating for policies that keep children healthy and safe while providing opportunities to allow them to succeed. Children First is the convener of the United for Kids 2016 Children's Agenda, which includes over 70 organizations and coalitions. Today, Children First is asking your support of SB 1532 A, a bill that would raise the minimum wage in Oregon.

As we all know, Oregon is a wonderful state, but unfortunately too many families are unable to provide their children with the basic necessities to allow their children the opportunities they need to succeed.

- More than 1 in 5 children in Oregon live in poverty, and the rate is much higher for children of color (38% of African American children; 33% of Pacific Islander children; 28% of Native American children; and 26% of Latino children).¹
- Most families in poverty in Oregon are working families (71%), yet even working full-time, a minimum wage worker does not make enough to lift a family out of poverty.²
- Rents are 9% higher while family income is 7% lower than before the Great Recession.³
- So many Oregon workers are paid so little that the federal and state government spends \$1.7 billion in taxpayer money each year on programs like food stamps and other income supports.⁴
- There has been extensive research documenting the negative effects of poverty on children and their ability to learn and develop.

The 2015 Kids Count Data Book from the Annie E. Casey Foundation ranks Oregon as 35th in the nation with regard to economic well-being. We can do better. When families earn enough money to support their families, everyone wins. Families that earn more, spend more, which helps to stimulate the state's economy. They also become taxpayers and are less reliant on social welfare programs. It's time for Oregon to help the hard-working parents of these children earn their way out of poverty and to make work pay. It's time to raise Oregon's minimum wage.

Please help us to make Oregon the best place to be a kid by voting yes on SB 1532 A. Thank you for your attention and your work on behalf of Oregon's children.

¹ Oregon Center for Public Policy. October 2015. "Poverty in Oregon in Six Charts."

² Oregon Center for Public Policy. December 2015. "Poverty Despite Work: A Growing Problem in Oregon."

³ Children First for Oregon. "2016 Children's Agenda: A Legislative Policy Agenda for Oregon's Kids."

⁴ Reddy, Taahi, Daniel Morris, Ellen K. Scott, Bob Bssel, and Shauna Dyer. January 2015. "The High Cost of Low Wages in Oregon." *Oregon Workforce Report 2014*. University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center.