

February 15, 2016

To: House Business and Labor Committee
From: Darlene Huntress, Executive Director, Oregon Action
Re: Support of SB 1532A

Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee,

My name is Darlene Huntress, I live in Salem, and I am the Executive Director of Oregon Action. Since 1986 we have been empowering people to come together and advocate on our own behalf to address community needs and advance justice in Oregon. This year we merged with our longtime partners, the Center for Intercultural Organizing (CIO). This unique and powerful merger is designed to allow both organizations to continue being the authentic community forces we have always been while leveraging our collective voices and people power to make change at the state level. It is with that mission in mind that I am here today to ask you to vote yes on SB 1532 to raise the minimum wage - for all Oregonians whether they live in Medford or Salem or Portland-- because no matter where you live in Oregon, you can't get by on \$19,000 a year.

This year as affiliates of the Alliance for a Just Society, we released a report that described the shortage of living wage jobs nationally and here in Oregon. The bottom line of that report is that while it's easy to tell a low-wage worker to "go get a better-paying job," the reality is there are nowhere near enough jobs that pay a living wage to go around. The occupations with the most job openings pay the least, and are often part-time. In Oregon, there are 234,000 job seekers, but only about 64,000 job openings. And of those jobs, only 52% offer a living wage for a single person. For a single adult with two children to support, the percentage of available living wage jobs is staggering: only 14%. At the same time, housing and other costs continue to rise. The result is that many workers and their families are falling further and further behind and our economy cannot truly recover while this continues to happen.

I want to be clear that we don't believe \$12.50 is nearly enough for workers in rural counties, particularly for communities of color, immigrants and refugees who face additional barriers to finding economic stability. However, we support the bill before you today to raise the minimum wage across the three regions of the state because it provides some relief for these rural families who continue to watch the wealth gap grow, it gives workers a much needed raise this year, and it doesn't exempt any workers through arbitrary classifications that have historically been based on discrimination of women, people of color, and immigrants. I ask that you vote yes on this bill and vote no to any amendments that would further compromise this bill.

Thank you,
Darlene Huntress
Executive Director, Oregon Action