

February 15, 2016

To: House Business and Labor Committee
From: Kayse Jama, Executive Director, Center for Intercultural Organizing
Re: Support of SB 1532A

Chair Holvey and Committee Members,

My name is Kayse Jama and I am the Executive Director of the Center for Intercultural Organizing. We are a diverse grassroots organization working to build a multi-racial, multi-cultural movement for immigrant and refugee rights. We believe that we are strongest -both as an organization and as a society - when we respect each other, empathize with one another, and struggle together toward justice.

I am here today to ask you to support SB 1532 to raise the minimum wage because this is a matter of economic and racial justice. 42% of minimum wage workers are people of color even though they make up only 32% of the workforce. Poverty and economic inequality disproportionately affect communities of color. In 2013 the poverty rates for Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander was 31.4%, Native American faced poverty at 31.2%, Black/African American at 30.6%, Latinos with 27.5%, Asian at 17.6%, and Whites with 15.5% facing poverty. Poverty experienced by communities of color are directly linked to systemic barriers including low wages. Immigrants and refugees of color face added challenges such as limiting rights and benefits, sanctioning employers, and multiple levels of discrimination and scapegoating.

The people that CIO serves have come to this country and to this state with plans to contribute their skills and labor to this economy and to build a life for themselves and their families. Our immigrant and refugee workers give so much to the Oregon economy and community but are often left out of economic opportunities to get ahead. A full time minimum wage worker currently makes less than \$20,000 a year and the notion that minimum wage jobs are only temporary or short-term jobs is simply not true for many people including immigrants and refugees. Immigrants and refugees often end up working in the toughest conditions and for the longest hours but fear facing being fired if they speak up to ask for improvements or raises. In many cases, they simply feel that they have no other employment opportunities.

We cannot ignore the urgent need for an improvement in people's pay and their lives while better economic opportunities are extremely hard to come by. Raising the minimum wage would have an immediate positive impact on the lives of low-wage workers and the economy. It would also allow more people to become self-sufficient and end the need for subsidies that corporations have created by paying poverty wages.

Now is the time to raise the minimum wage in Oregon. The bill before you today took a great deal of work and compromise to get here. We started at \$15 per hour and now it is less. We started with a three year phase in and now it is longer. We started with two regions and now there are three. We have given. The worker has given. The immigrant or the refugee who has

come here - sometimes under less than ideal circumstances - and is working full time but remains in poverty, has given. The single parent who skips meals so their child can eat even though she is working around the clock has given. I ask that this committee recognizes that contribution and votes to pass this bill to raise the minimum wage and give workers the compensation and the economic justice they deserve.

Thank you,

Kayse Jama
Executive Director, Center for Intercultural Organizing