

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our strong support for the Raise the Wage Act (H.R. 582). As lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and allied organizations, we believe raising the minimum wage is a critical LGBTQ issue. Raising the federal minimum wage would benefit LGBTQ people by helping to reduce poverty and increase stability and economic security for LGBTQ people and their families.

Because of discrimination in employment, housing, education, and other areas, LGBTQ individuals are more likely to be jobless, homeless, and poor than the general population. Nearly 40 million workers, including LGBTQ people, would receive increased wages from the Act.¹ In light of the disproportionate rates of poverty among LGBTQ people, passing this measure is a critical priority for our community.

The Raise the Wage Act would raise the federal minimum wage to \$8.55 this year and increase it gradually over the next five years until it reaches \$15 an hour in 2024.² After 2024, the minimum wage would be adjusted annually to keep pace with growth in the typical worker's wages.³ In addition, the Act would phase out the outdated subminimum wage for tipped workers, which has been stagnant at \$2.13 since 1991.⁴ It would also sunset the ability for employers to pay a subminimum wage to workers with disabilities⁵ and phase out the subminimum wage for workers under the age of 20.⁶

An increase in the federal minimum wage would help the LGBTQ community, especially its most marginalized members. A disproportionate number of LGBTQ people currently live in poverty and 6.2% of the LGBTQ community live in households earning less than \$36,000 annually.⁷ Raising the minimum wage to \$15 would decrease poverty by almost 50% among female same-sex couples and by 35% among male same-sex couples.⁸

Transgender people would be particularly impacted by this bill. Almost one-third of transgender people live in poverty, which is more than twice the rate of the U.S. general population.⁹

¹ David Cooper, "Raising the Federal Minimum Wage to \$15 by 2024 Would Lift Pay for Nearly 40 Million Workers" (2019), <https://www.epi.org/publication/raising-the-federal-minimum-wage-to-15-by-2024-would-lift-pay-for-nearly-40-million-workers/>.

² Raise the Wage Act, H.R. 582, 116th Cong. §2(a)(1), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/582/text>.

³ *Id.* at §2(h)

⁴ NELP, "It's Time for the Raise the Wage Act of 2019," <https://www.nelp.org/publication/raise-wage-act-2019-letter-support/>.

⁵ Raise the Wage Act, H.R. 582, 116th Cong. §6 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/582/text>.

⁶ *Id.* at §4

⁷ Sandy E. James, "The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey" (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality), available at <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>.

⁸ Williams Institute, "\$15 Wage Would Lift Nearly 30,000 People in Same Sex Couples Out of Poverty" (2016), available at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/15-wage-would-lift-nearly-30000-people-in-same-sex-couples-out-of-poverty/>.

⁹ Sandy E. James, "The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey" (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality), available at <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>.

The bill would also have a profound impact on LGBTQ youth, who make up between 30% and 40% of homeless youth.¹⁰ 47% of these LGBTQ homeless youth are persons of color.¹¹ Since 55% of homeless LGBTQ youth were forced out by their parents or ran away because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, more than 50% of LGBTQ homeless youth remain homeless for longer periods of time than non-LGBTQ homeless youth.¹² Raising the wage and phasing out the subminimum wage for workers under age 20 will help reduce homelessness among LGBTQ youth by helping them afford housing and achieve economic security independent of their families.

Additionally, the Act will have enormous impacts on LGBTQ people of color and LGBTQ women. 37% of the LGBTQ community identify as people of color.¹³ Under the Act, 40% of Black workers and 34% of Latino/a workers will benefit.¹⁴ Women account for nearly 56% of the workers benefiting from an increased minimum wage.¹⁵ Women also account for 2/3 of the country's tipped workers, who are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than the rest of the workforce.¹⁶ LGBTQ women are more likely than their non-LGBTQ counterparts to receive public assistance, be unemployed, and be near or under the poverty level.¹⁷

Critics of the bill have argued that against raising the federal minimum wage, proposing instead that minimum wages should be established by region.¹⁸ However, a minimum wage of \$15 by 2024 is not unrealistic in any part of the U.S.¹⁹ In addition, rural communities have a strong incentive to support the Act because they are experiencing a housing affordability crisis in part due to flat incomes for low- and moderate-income workers in those communities.²⁰

Additionally, the Act's plan to phase in the \$15 wage over six years allows for lower-wage states and regions to adjust to the new wage.²¹ Opponents of the bill also contend that small businesses

¹⁰Choi, Soon Kyu, et al., "Serving Our Youth 2015," <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Serving-Our-Youth-June-2015.pdf>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Williams Institute, "Just the Facts: LGBT Data Overview 2015," available at https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/datablog/just-the-facts-data-overview_2015/.

¹⁴ NELP, "It's Time for the Raise the Wage Act 2019," <https://www.nelp.org/publication/raise-wage-act-2019-letter-support/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) United analysis of American Community Survey (2016). Ruggles, S., Genadek, K., Goeken, R., and Soebek, M. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0 [dataset], (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2017).

¹⁷ Williams Institute, "Socioeconomic Status of Sexual Minorities" (2018), available at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/ses-sexual-minorities/>.

¹⁸ NELP, "The Federal Minimum Wage Should be a Robust National Wage Floor, Not Adjusted Region by Region," <https://www.nelp.org/publication/federal-minimum-wage-robust-national-wage-floor-not-adjusted-region-region/>

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Aimee Picchi, "Housing Hidden Crisis: Rural Americans Struggle to Pay Rent" (CBS News, 2019), https://www.cbsnews.com/news/housings-hidden-crisis-rural-americans-struggling-to-pay-the-rent/?fbclid=IwAR23-UF96fTDZe1_T4uddC7IE-RFtri02c57GSRE72QjHa_kRfFRbsPUIpo

²¹ *Id.*

do not benefit from raising the wage. However, 61% of American small business owners support raising the minimum wage.²²

For these reasons, we support the Raise the Wage Act and urge you to consider the enormous benefits the bill will bring to the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ workers need jobs that allow them to have security and take care of themselves and their families.

²² Business for a Fair Minimum Wage, “National Poll: Small Business Owners Favor Raising Federal Minimum Wage,” <https://www.businessforfairminimumwage.org/news/00573/national-poll-small-business-owners-favor-raising-federal-minimum-wage>.