

February 24, 2021

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our strong support for the Raise the Wage Act of 2021 (H.R. 603). As lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and allied organizations, we believe raising the minimum wage is a critical LGBTQ issue. Even while frontline workers risk their lives each day during the COVID-19 pandemic, they struggle to make ends meet at home on meager wages. Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour is a significant step that will help lift LGBTQ workers and families out of poverty.

Due to generational poverty¹ and discrimination in employment, housing, education, and other areas, LGBTQ individuals are more likely to be jobless, homeless, and poor than the general population. Nearly 32 million workers², including 1.4 million LGBTQ people³, would receive increased wages from the Act. 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 gradually raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 by 2025.⁴ After 2025, the minimum wage would be adjusted annually to keep pace with growth in the typical worker's wages.⁵ In addition, the Act would phase out the subminimum wage for tipped workers, which has been stagnant at \$2.13 since 1991.⁶ It would also sunset employers' ability to pay a subminimum wage to workers with disabilities⁷ and phase out the subminimum wage for workers under the age of 20.⁸

An increase in the federal minimum wage would help the LGBTQ community, especially its most marginalized members. Incomes would rise above the poverty level for nearly 30,000 people in same-sex relationships.⁹ 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.¹⁰

¹ Williams Institute, "Pathways Into Poverty: Lived experiences among LGBTQ people" (2020), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/pathways-into-poverty/>

² Economic Policy Institute, "Why the U.S. needs a \$15 minimum wage: How the Raise the Wage Act would benefit U.S. workers and their families" (2021), <https://www.epi.org/publication/why-america-needs-a-15-minimum-wage/>.

³ Williams Institute, "Raising the Federal Minimum Wage: Impact on LGBT Adults" (2019) <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/raising-fed-min-wage-lgbt-adults/>

⁴ Raise the Wage Act of 2021, H.R. 603, 117th Cong. §2(a)(1), <https://edlabor.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Raise%20the%20Wage%20Bill%20Text1.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.* at §2(h)

⁶ NELP, "It's Time for the Raise the Wage Act of 2019," <https://www.nelp.org/publication/raise-wage-act-2019-letter-support/>.

⁷ Raise the Wage Act, H.R. 582, 116th Cong. §6 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/582/text>.

⁸ *Id.* at §4

⁹ 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/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

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.¹¹

The bill would also have a profound impact on LGBTQ youth, who make up between 30% and 40% of homeless youth.¹² 47% of these LGBTQ homeless youth are persons of color.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ The Black Futures Lab found low wages are the biggest concern facing Black LGB people.¹⁶ Under the Act, 31% of Black workers and 26% of Latino/a workers will benefit.¹⁷ Women account for nearly 59% of the workers benefiting from an increased minimum wage.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ LGBTQ women are more likely than their non-LGBTQ counterparts to receive public assistance, be unemployed, and be near or under the poverty level.²⁰

Critics of the bill have argued against raising the federal minimum wage, proposing instead that minimum wages should be established by region.²¹ However, a minimum wage of \$15 by 2025 is not unrealistic in any part of the U.S.²² In addition, rural communities have a strong incentive

¹¹Sandy 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>.

¹² Choi, Soon Kyu, et al., "Serving Our Youth 2015," <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Serving-Our-Youth-June-2015.pdf>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Williams Institute, "Just the Facts: LGBT Data Overview 2015," available at

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/datablog/just-the-facts-data-overview-2015/>.

¹⁶ Black Futures Lab, "When the Rainbow Is Not Enough: LGB+ Voices in the 2019 Black Census" (2019) <https://blackcensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/When-The-Rainbow-Is-Not-Enough.pdf>

¹⁷ *Supra*, note 2.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ Williams Institute, "Socioeconomic Status of Sexual Minorities" (2018), available at <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/ses-sexual-minorities/>.

²¹ 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/>.

²² *Id.*

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.²³

Additionally, the Act's plan to phase in the \$15 wage over four years allows for lower-wage states and regions to adjust to the new wage.²⁴ Opponents of the bill also contend that small businesses do not benefit from raising the wage. However, 61% of American small business owners support raising the minimum wage.²⁵

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.

If you have any questions, please contact National Center for Lesbian Rights Senior Policy Counsel Tyrone Hanley at thanley@nclrights.org.

Sincerely,

9to5
A Better Balance
Advocates for Youth
African American Health Alliance
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Alabama
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
AIDS Legal Referral Panel
AIDS United
Alaskans Together For Equality
Albany Damien Center
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Athlete Ally
Atlanta Pride Committee
Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative
BiNet USA
Black AIDS Institute
Cascade AIDS Project
Center for American Progress
Center for Black Equity
Center for Disability Rights

²³ Aimee Picchi, "Housing's 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.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ 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>.

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Coalition on Human Needs
DC Fights Back
Equality California
Equality Federation
Equality Illinois
Equality North Carolina
Equality Utah
Fair Wisconsin
Family Equality
Family Values @ Work
FORGE, Inc.
GAPIMNY—Empowering Queer & Trans Asian Pacific Islanders
GLSEN
Hispanic Federation
Howard Brown Health
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Interfaith Worker Justice
Lambda Legal
Latinos Salud
Legal Aid at Work - Gender Equity & LGBTQ Rights Program
LGBTQ Allyship
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Mazzoni Center
Modern Military Association of America
MomsRising
Movement Advancement Project
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)
National Employment Law Project
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National LGBT Cancer Network
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National LGBTQ Workers Center
National Women's Law Center
National Working Positive Coalition
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New York City Anti-Violence Project
Oasis Legal Services
Open Health Care Clinic
Oxfam America
PathWays PA

People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Positive Women's Network-USA
Poz Military Veterans USA INTL
Pride at Work
PROMO
Reframe Health and Justice
RESULTS DC/MD
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
Shelter Resources, Inc.
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Silver State Equality-Nevada
Southerners On New Ground
The AIDS Institute
The DC Center for the LGBT Community
The National LGBTQ Workers Center
The Trevor Project
The Well Project
Thrive Alabama
TRANScending Barriers
Transgender Law Center
Treatment Action Group
Treatment Action Group (TAG)
True Colors United
UCHAPS
Union for Reform Judaism
United States People Living with HIV Caucus
United We Dream
Urban Justice Center
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
US People Living with HIV Caucus
Voices for Progress
Workplace Fairness