

Amendment to the 2014 Increasing the Minimum Wage Resolution

Adopted by the 2019 JCPA Delegates Assembly

Jewish tradition repeatedly calls for social justice, demanding that we not only feed the hungry, but also help those in need become self-sufficient. The Torah repeatedly emphasizes the need to treat workers fairly. According to Deuteronomy 24:14-15, "You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer .. but you must pay him his wages on the same day, ... for he is needy and urgently depends on it...." The federal minimum wage, \$7.25 since July, 2009, has failed to keep up with the cost of living. Had it kept up since 1968 when it was \$1.60, in today's dollars it would now be close to \$11.55 an hour. The federal minimum wage law was enacted in 1938 to establish a floor, below which wages would not go, but for too many workers the floor is also the ceiling.

Historically, minimum wage workers were more likely to be the less advantaged among us—younger rather than older, female rather than male, African-American or Latino rather than white—and that is still the case. Even though the current unemployment rate is low, workers of every age, gender and race find themselves working at jobs that only pay the minimum wage.

A single woman working full time at \$7.25 per hour might manage to keep herself at or slightly above the poverty line, depending on where she lives, but she would fall below it if she had any dependent children. Many minimum wage jobs are part time and many low wage workers work several part-time jobs in an effort to feed, clothe and house themselves and their families. Many of these workers survive only because of a tax-supported increasingly frayed social safety net – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, subsidized housing, the earned income tax credit and Medicaid. It is a disturbing development that many households with one or more full time workers are eligible for SNAP benefits or housing because wages are too low.

Most minimum wage jobs are in service industries and, as the economic recovery has lagged, most of the job growth has been in the service sector. These are workers in the food service, leisure and hospitality, and health industries. They work in restaurants, hotels, nursing homes, hospitals, and retail.

A proposed increase in the minimum wage to \$15 per hour would raise the wages of about 41 million workers. More than half of the workers who would benefit are adults between the ages of 25 and 54, and nearly two-thirds work full time. More than half (56 percent) are working women, and nearly 30 percent have children. Their pay increase would provide needed economic stimulus, increase gross domestic product and create new jobs.

The failure of the Congress to pass legislation raising the minimum wage has led many to advocate for legislation raising the wage at the state and local levels. This will benefit some workers, but it is no substitute for comprehensive national legislation.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs believes:

- A wage earner working full time should be able to provide a minimum level of support for themselves and their family;
- Federal legislation should set a floor, commonly agreed to approach \$15/hour;
- The failure to require a minimum wage which keeps workers out of poverty subsidizes low wage employers at the expense of society; and
- The need for safety net programs, such as SNAP, affordable housing, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and Medicaid would be lessened if the minimum wage were raised to an adequate level.

The Jewish community relations field should:

- Educate about the failure of the minimum wage to keep pace with the cost of living;
- Educate about the fact that the minimum wage is too low to keep workers and their families out of poverty;

- Advocate for legislation increasing the federal minimum wage to at least \$15/hour by 2024, and thereafter annually indexing the minimum wage with an appropriate Bureau of Labor Statistics' cost of living index, increasing the minimum wage for tipped workers by \$0.90 per year until it reaches 70% of the non-tipped wage, and then indexing it so that it remains at 70%;
- Advocate for increases in the minimum wage at the state and local levels;
- Encourage Jewish organizations to institute a \$15/hour minimum wage policy for all of their employees and contractors' employees.