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NY Communities for Change

Good afternoon, my name is Narda Rodriguez and I'm a member of New York Communities for Change. I came to Brooklyn about almost two years ago from Dominican Republic. Back home, my husband and I had a business, something like a Kinkos. We were forced to migrate after one of our business partners was involved in a fraud and left us with a \$20,000 debt. On top of this debt, we didn't have enough to cover our monthly expenses or pay the kids college tuition. I came here thinking that our lives were going to be easier, that if we worked hard we would get ahead. I never imagined that finding a job would be so difficult. I worked in a beauty salon, where I earned \$60 a day. Working at a beauty shop you don't have a schedule, I used to work 10-13 hours a day 6 days a week. Working there was very hard, you are on your feet all day, handling chemicals for hair dyes, washing and cutting hair and I was only making \$6 an hour. My family and I are going through a really hard time, since before the holidays we've had to work miracles to pay bills and have enough for food. Both of my children and I lost our jobs, and we depend solely on my husband who works in a bodega. My husband works 6 days a week, 10 hours a day and earning \$600 a week. He doesn't get paid overtime, or have any type of benefits. My husband basically administers the business as if he were the owner, except he doesn't own anything, just the responsibility. With \$600 a week, we have to cover rent at \$1,300 a month, cover all our bills and maintain a family of 4. We cannot afford to make any mistakes on our budget. We are constantly worried about my husband's health, I don't know what would happen if he ever gets sick and has to take a day or two off work. He, like many immigrants is paid only if he works. If he had a wage of \$15 an hour our lives would be so different. For one we wouldn't have to share a one bedroom apartment with 4 people. My kids would give an opportunity to return to the university and have a better quality of life. We don't aspire to own a house or be rich, we just want to earn enough money to cover our basic expenses, and not live worried over every penny.

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Good afternoon my name is Jose Hernandez and I'm a member of New York Communities for Change. I immigrated to this country from Dominican Republic 5 years ago. Back home I was able to study and worked under the president and under the administration of the mayor of Santo Domingo. I was a supervisor, and earned an average of \$220 a month, and even though this was considered a good job, it wasn't enough to survive on. Because of my circumstances I had to migrate to this country like many of my co-workers, seeking a better future for my family. My first job in Brooklyn was working at a bodega. I used to work 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, for \$300. This means I was earning \$4.17 an hour! With these wages I had to pay \$940 a month in rent, bills, transportation and food, plus I sent \$200 back to my family in DR. After all my expenses I had \$200 a month for any personal expenses. Today, 5 years later I work at a Latin Food Restaurant as a cook's assistant. I work 48-60 hours a week for \$300. Or, rather I earn \$6.25 an hour. Five years later the rent, food, and transportation costs have gone up, but I'm still earning the same wages. I work hard and my wages are low, how can I survive like this? Just to put it in perspective, I remember a couple of months ago; I had to run some errands with a friend of mine. We were out all day, and when we got hungry we found a place to eat. I had \$100 with me, part of the money that I use for my monthly personal expenses. I thought \$100 would be more than enough, so we didn't check the prices. I was shocked when we got the bill of \$86 dollars, and didn't know what to do. The experience of that day will be with me forever, I will never forget how I spent the money that was supposed to last me at least two weeks, all in one day. Now, in order to make sure this doesn't happen to me again, I think twice before eating out. I feel depressed and frustrated, how is it possible that five years later I'm working harder than ever and I'm barely surviving. In New York I have to work every waking hour, I have to calculate every dollar, every cent I spend. Other workers like me are in the same situation, and we need \$15 an hour. For me being able to earn a decent wage would mean that I wouldn't have to work so many hours. I would be able to walk into a restaurant and eat when I'm hungry without worrying about the check. We aren't asking for a lot, only what is fair. \$15 is a good start, but we need a minimum wage that increases as the cost of living goes up. No one should have to live through this, working so hard to have a dignified life. Thank you.

Good afternoon and thank-you for the opportunity to speak here today

My name is Aracely Cantos and I am a member of the Worker's Justice Committee at Make the Road New York. I live in Jackson Heights, Queens.

Four years ago I travelled to this country from Ecuador. Like many of you, I came in search of opportunity so that I could care for myself and my family. What I have come across over the last four years was not what I expected.

Currently, I work two jobs. In one I make the minimum wage of \$9.00/hour and in the other I make \$10/hour. I have to work two jobs, because at my wage one does not even come close to covering my expenses. Even with two jobs I struggle daily to make ends meet. I never imagined living in a city where you can work full time and still live in poverty.

Because of my wages I cannot afford to rent an apartment of my own. I live with my mother and we share an apartment with two other people we didn't know before moving in together. Living with people we don't know well creates a lot of stress, but we don't have another choice.

My message here today is that every worker should receive a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. That is why we need to raise the minimum wage to at least \$15/hour for all workers in New York State.

Thank-you.

Buenas tardes y agradecimiento por la oportunidad de hablar aquí hoy.

Mi nombre es Aracely Cantos y yo soy un miembro de la Comisión de Justicia del Trabajador en Se Hace Camino Nueva York. Vivo en Jackson Heights, Queens.

Hace cuatro años he viajado a este país de Ecuador. Como muchas otras personas, he venido en busca de oportunidades para que pudiera cuidar de mí mismo y mi familia. Lo que he encontrado en los últimos cuatro años no era lo que esperaba.

Actualmente, tengo dos trabajos. En una gano el salario mínimo de \$ 9.00 / hora y en el otro gano \$ 10 / hora. Tengo que trabajar en dos empleos, porque en mi salario uno ni siquiera se acercan a cubrir mis gastos. Incluso con dos puestos de trabajo lucho todos los días para llegar a fin de mes. Nunca imaginé vivir en una ciudad donde se puede trabajar a tiempo completo y todavía vivir en la pobreza.

Debido a mi salario no puedo darse el lujo de alquilar un apartamento de mi propia. Vivo con mi madre y tenemos que compartir un apartamento con otras dos personas que no conociamos antes de vivir juntos. La convivencia con personas que no conocemos bien crea una gran cantidad de estrés, pero no tenemos otra opción.

Mi mensaje de hoy es que cada trabajador debe recibir una paga digna por un día de trabajo. Es por eso que tenemos que aumentar el salario mínimo de al menos \$ 15 / hora para todos los trabajadores en el estado de Nueva York.

Gracias

Testimony of Christina Molina. February 3rd, 2016

Good afternoon and thank-you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Christina Molina and I'm a member of Make the Road New York. I've lived in this country for more than 23 years. Like many of you I arrived here with many dreams. My first dream was to improve to lives of my four children and my family in Mexico, but I found that the wages we earn here are too low.

I work cleaning houses and earn the minimum wage. My rent alone living in Woodside, Queens is \$1,800 a month. This is in addition to all other the other bills and expense I have to pay. Therefore I have to work two jobs just to try to cover basic expenses. I also work cleaning houses, back breaking work where I spend most of the day on my knees. Still I find myself coming up short. I am not able to by all the things my children need, and this is very difficult as a mother. The truth is it is impossible to get ahead in this expensive city on my wages. Raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour for me is an issue of survival. A \$15 an hour would mean there might be enough food in my house at night.

As working people we deserve a dignified and fair wage. We need \$15/hour in order to live and in order to create a better life to our children. That is why I'm asking our state representatives to pass a \$15 an hour minimum wage this year. It's the right thing to do for working people, for families, and for our State.

Thank-you

Buenos Dias y gracias por la oportunidad a hablar hoy. Mi nombre es Christina Molina. Soy miembro de Se Hace Camino Nueva York y he vivido en este país por más de 23 años. Como muchos de ustedes Llegué aquí con muchos sueños. Mi primer sueño era mejorar de vida de mis cuatro hijos y mi familia en México, pero me encontré con que los salarios que ganamos aquí son demasiado bajos.

Yo trabajo limpiando casa y gano el salario mínimo. Mi alquiler solo viviendo en Woodside, Queens es de \$ 1,800 al mes. Esto se suma al resto de los gastos que tengo que pagar. Por lo tanto, tengo que trabajar en dos empleos sólo para tratar de cubrir los gastos básicos. También trabajo limpiando casas, agotador trabajo donde puedo enviar la mayor parte del día en mis rodillas. Todavía me encuentro quedarse corto. Yo no soy capaz de por todas las cosas que mis hijos necesitan, y esto es muy difícil como madre. La verdad es que es imposible salir adelante en esta ciudad cara con mi salario. Aumentar el salario mínimo a \$ 15 / hora para mí es una cuestión de supervivencia. A \$ 15 la hora significaría que podría haber suficiente comida en mi casa por la noche.

Como los trabajadores nos merecemos un salario digno y justo. Necesitamos \$ 15 / hora con el fin de vivir y con el fin de crear una vida mejor para nuestros hijos. Es por eso que estoy pidiendo nuestra legislatura estatal para aprobar una \$ 15 la hora salario mínimo este año.

Es lo que hay que hacer por el pueblo trabajador, para las familias, y para nuestro Estado. Gracias

My name is Rigoberto Quintero I am part of the New York City Car Wash Campaign. I immigrated from Honduras about 10 years ago in search for a better life for my family. Currently I work at SLS Car Wash in East New York. I have been working there for about 2 years, I have to work two jobs to support my family and pay the bills. Currently, I am working a part-time job at SLS car wash and a full-time job in construction. After working a 10-hour shift in construction I only have about an hour to eat, and then off to my graveyard shift at the car wash.

Currently, my wife was recently laid-off from her job as laundry attendant. My wife and I have four children back in Honduras. They depend on me to pay for school, food, rent and all other basic expenses. Two of my daughters are enrolled in college and rely on my financial support to afford the tuition. My two younger sons who are still too young to work are completely dependent on me to provide for them. I send back home \$400 dollars monthly to cover my family expenses.

At this point, I cannot pay my rent or utilities on time, sometimes I have to make the difficult choice of putting food on the table or paying my gas bill. My current income is not enough for me to provide the basic necessities for my family. I have to support two households, and with the wages I make, working two jobs is just not enough. Right now I am making \$80 dollars per day working in construction, which is a very laborious work. Due to the lack of work and weather conditions I sometimes work only 3 to 4 days. Additionally, due to the distance between my home and jobs I spend approximately \$165 dollars commuting back and forth.

Having the availability to make \$15 an hour will completely change the life of my family. This will mean that I don't have to choose between paying my bills or buying food for them. Also this will allow me to send my children back in Honduras a little extra cash for them to afford healthcare. I will be able to move to an apartment where my son will have his own room and not share it with a stranger. My dream one day is to work a single job where I can make enough money to provide for my family, but most importantly spend time with them. This is why making \$15 an hour is so important for me.

RWDSU

Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union

Stuart Appelbaum, President
Jack C. Wurm, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer
Joseph Dorismond, Recorder
Gemma de Leon, Executive Vice President

Joint Budget Hearing on Workforce Development

February 3, 2016

Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building, 2nd Floor
Albany, New York 12247

Testimony by Ivasia Sanford

Member of the Retail Action Project,
An Initiative of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, UFCW

Hello my name is Ivasia Sanford and I am 22 years old. I have worked at Old Navy in Gateway, Brooklyn for 4 months. I am here to testify in support of raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

I was first hired as a seasonal employee in the fall, earning \$9.50, but was kept on after the holidays at the same rate of pay. I was forced to work on Thanksgiving, Black Friday and the Saturday following for 10 hours each day and with no additional incentives to leave my family and work those days. I was scheduled for back to back shifts, something we call "Clopenings" which meant leaving the store after 11 p.m to run and catch the last bus home and then waking up early the next morning to open the store.

When I was first hired I was working 25-30 hours a week but shortly after the holidays my hours dropped down to 10 hours a week and I would only receive my schedule 2 days in advance.

It's a frustrating, complicated and never-ending battle as a single mother working in the retail industry. In addition to the issues I mentioned, the pay is nowhere near enough to cover everything my son needs so I have had to depend on government assistance for basic needs like food and diapers.

Before considering retail I worked in food service and really, it's all the same, low pay, no hours, overworked and understaffed. I thought that if I worked in retail it would be different and that I'd have a greater chance of growing with the company but my experience has been that managers have favorites who they consider before other hard-working employees such as myself, which can be very discouraging. The company has high expectations of employees but does not have consideration for their lives outside of work and has created little space for advancement or raises.

RWDSU

Stuart Appelbaum, *President*
Jack C. Wurm, Jr., *Secretary-Treasurer*
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Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union

Raising the wage to \$15 will be helpful to me because not only am I a single mother I'm also still living under my mother's roof and with \$15 I could actually save money to move into my own place. I'm overjoyed at the idea of my son having his own space to grow and the potential for him to have a chance at a healthy upbringing with access to more opportunities while he's still young. Being able to end my dependence on government assistance would definitely be a boost to my self esteem and knowing that I could work hard to support the both of us in meeting our daily needs without having to worry about paying a bill or skipping a meal just to make ends meet makes me want to fight everyday for this increase in the minimum wage. I am here to speak on behalf of all struggling working parents in the retail sector who need a \$15 minimum wage to survive and make ends meet. We are counting on you to make it a reality this year.

Thank you for your time.

Testimony of Maria Rubio del Carmen of Jamaica, Queens. February 3, 2016

(English translation below)

Gracias por la oportunidad a hablar aqui hoy. Yo soy Maria Rubio. vengo de Honduras y tengo 47 anos. Vivo actualmente en Jamaica, Queens. En mi pais era abogada de derechos humanos. Tuve que salir de mi pais por defender a un cliente, una mujer que fue mutilado por miembros de una ganga. Por defenderla la ganga me amenazo que me mataria y intentaron a matarme. Sali de mi pais para salvar me vida y tuve que dejar mis dos hijos en Honduras. Al llega en Nueva York, tuve que empezar mi vida al nuevo.

Mi primer trabajo en este pais fue en un restaurante sirviendo y limpiando. Alli yo trabaje por un mes sin pago y despues de un mes tuve que salir porque nunca me pegaron. Por los ultimos casi dos anos he trabajado liampando casa. Trabajo para una compania basado en New York que me manda a limpiar casas no solamente en Nueva York, pero tambien en New Jersey y en Long Island. A veces tengo que viajar por dos horas para llegar al trabajo y la compania no me paga transporte. En este trabajo tengo una hora de entrada pero nunca tengo una hora de salida. Trabajo 12-13 horas al dia, casi todo timepo de pie or de rodillas, sin parar or tomar agua, or tomar un break. A veces llego a las 9 de la manana y no puedo almorzar hasta las 4pm de la tarde. Trabajo 5 dias la semana y muchos fin de semana tambien, unos dias desde las 8:00 de la manana hasta las 2:00 de la noche. Gano \$80 dolares el dia.

Por trabajar de rodillas todos los dias dane el nervio de mis rodillas y me duele constantemente. A veces por el dolor no puedo subir las escaleras en el tren y no puedo pagar por los medicamentos para controlar el dolor.

Despues de todo eso me quedo en mi trabajo y no llevo quejas porque tengo que soportar mis dos hijos. No puedo perder mi trabajo.

Es importante que escuchan mi voz porque atras de mi hay miles de mujeres trabajando en las mis situaciones con las mismas experiencias.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Maria Rubio. I am from Honduras and I am 47 years old. I live in Jamaica, Queens. In my country I was a human rights lawyer. I had to leave Honduras because I defended a client, a woman who was mutilated by members of a gang. Because I defended her the gang members threatened me and attempted to kill me. I left to save me life and I had to leave my two children in Honduras.

Upon arriving in New York, I had to start my life over. My first job in this country was in a restaurant serving and cleaning. I worked for a month, but they never paid me so I had to leave. I started working in a different restaurant and all started well until the owner asked me to wear a short skirt and sit with the clients to earn more tips. In this job they paid me only \$25 for the entire day and my boss took all my tips. When I understood that this was not a normal restaurant and that part of my job would be to flirt with the clients and let them touch me, I left the job.

For the last two years I have worked cleaning houses. I work for a company based in New York City, but they send me to clean houses not only in New York, but in New Jersey and Long Island. Sometimes I have to travel for two hours to arrive at work and the company doesn't pay me for this. In the job I have

Testimony of Maria Rubio del Carmen of Jamaica, Queens. February 3, 2016

a start time, but I never have an end time. I work 12-13 hours a day, almost the entire time on my knees, without stopping or being able to take a break for water. Sometimes I arrive at 9 in the morning and I don't eat till 4:00 in the afternoon. I work five days a week and many weekends as well, some days from 8:00am to 2:00pm at night. I make about \$80 a day

I have had three accidents in my job. The first time my manager told me to clean an apartment that he was going to rent out to new tenants. He told me "the work you normally do in 10 hours, you need to do in five, because I have to rent this apartment today." He didn't give me gloves or a mask and I didn't know, but there was fungus in the apartment. When I left, I started to feel bad and after a few hours I had to go to the hospital. I had a fever and was so ill that the hospital put me in quarantine, thinking I was infectious. After three days I left the hospital and had to return to more time and be out of work for a week. They didn't pay me to be out of work.

The second accident was because I always work on my knees almost the entire day. Because of this I damaged a nerve in my knee and it hurts me constantly. Sometimes I can't even walk up the stairs to the subway due to the pain. The third accident, I was cleaning the floor and a client asked me to clean it with a lot of water. Because I was using so much water, I slipped and fell from the third floor to the second on my back and injured by spine.

Even after this I stay in my job and I don't complain because I have to support my two children. I can't afford to lose my job. It is important that you hear my story, because I represent thousands of other women who are in the same situation and have the same experiences.