



Written Testimony of Mr. Jason Adkins, Executive Director

The House Select Committee on Living Wage Jobs

February 27, 2013

Family Economic Security Act

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Jason Adkins, and I am executive director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota. MCC wishes to express its support for an increase in Minnesota's minimum wage.

The Church's advocacy in the public arena is aimed at protecting the God-given dignity of each human person from conception to natural death, and the common good of all of society. In the order of creation, work is a means of the development of the human person, and protects his or her dignity by providing a means of subsistence. Work also has a social dimension in that it is done with others and for others.

Catholic teaching thus emphasizes both a person's right to work and a responsibility to work. That work, however, must be remunerated by just wages that provide access to the basic necessities of the person and his or her family. When civil society fails to provide access to just wages for all persons, the state—an instrument of justice, in this case, economic justice—may set a minimum wage rate.

The Church's experience indicates that people want to work especially when they can look hopefully forward to fair wages, benefits and opportunity for advancement. We believe that the enactment of a minimum wage increase in Minnesota could provide a major lift to low-income working families. Doing so will help restore work as a way out of poverty, a centerpiece recommendation of the Legislative Commission to End Poverty—an initiative which had its origins of local faith leaders, including the state's Catholic bishops.

Therefore, the Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC) supports the Family Economic Security Act (FESA), H.F. 430¹; S.F. 399², which, among other things, raises the state minimum wage to \$9.50 per hour. Increasing the minimum wage puts more money in a family's pocket and increases its purchasing power; it recognizes the dignity of the human person; and it helps to end poverty in Minnesota.

The bishops of Minnesota don't pretend to be economists, but they are pastors, and the Church does oversee the largest nongovernmental network of health, education and charitable ministries in the state.

What we can tell you from first-hand experience is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the working poor of our state to make ends meet. For example:

- A full-time minimum-wage earner in Minnesota at \$7.25 an hour will bring in \$15,080 per year, which is \$4,010 below the 2013 federal poverty guidelines for a family of three.³
- 24 percent of Minnesota working families are considered “low income.” (200 percent of FPG)⁴
- In Minnesota, no full-time worker living on minimum wage can afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent. In fact, it would take 86 hours of employment per week to afford it.⁵

If the minimum wage were increased to \$9.50 per hour, families of seven or fewer would rise above the FPG if both parents work 40 hours.⁶ The minimum wage should keep pace with inflation, match increases in the cost of living, and ensure families are able to pay for basic needs.

By no means do we question the intentions or motivations of our good friends in the legislature who oppose an increase in the minimum wage. We also believe that the needs of small businesses should be considered; small businesses cannot absorb the costs of such a wage increase in the same way that larger businesses can. But it is our hope and our prayer that the two sides could come together for some sort of action to address the grave problems facing the lowest wage earners in our state. We believe an increase in the minimum wage is a matter of fairness and justice, and we hope it can be addressed soon. We urge continued consideration of these and other ways, compatible with a healthy economy, to enhance workers’ incomes. Thank you.

¹ <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H0430.0.html&session=ls88>

² <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bin/bldbill.php?bill=S0399.0.html&session=ls88>

³ 2013 HHS Poverty Guidelines as reported in *Federal Register*, Vol. 78, No. 16, January 24, 2013, pp. 5182-5183

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011, available at http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Winter-2012_2013-WFPF-Data-Brief.pdf

⁵ National Low Income Housing Coalition, available at <http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/2012-OOR-Min-Wage-Map.pdf> (2012)

⁶ 2013 HHS Poverty Guidelines, see note 3.