Pennsylvania Council of Churches

A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR A LIVING WAGE FOR ALL WORKERS

WHEREAS: Prophetic voices throughout the ages have called upon those in power to show justice to the poorest and most vulnerable in society: (1) the prophet Amos exhorted the people of Israel to "Hate evil and love good, and establish justice. Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"; (2) in Deuteronomy 24:14-15 we read, "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers…You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them"; and (3) in 1 Timothy 5:18 we read, "The laborer deserves to be paid"; and

WHEREAS: In The Lord's Prayer, Jesus exhorts us to pray, "give us this day our daily bread" (often unaffordable for those with low wages), and the philosopher Maimonides declares the highest level of charity: "The greatest level, above which there is no greater, is to support a fellow Jew by endowing him with a gift or loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding employment for him, in order to strengthen his hand until he need no longer be dependent upon others . . ."; and

WHEREAS: Poverty has become a disease, striking at the very heart of the United States, attacking the most vulnerable—Even those who lived a comfortable middle class existence are finding that they are going backwards; and

WHEREAS: The ranks of the working poor continue to grow in this country, because the minimum wage has become a poverty wage—those receiving it cannot survive without public assistance, sometimes even working several jobs, trying to make ends meet; and

WHEREAS: The real value of the minimum wage today is significantly less than it was in 1968, and it continues to decline without cost of living adjustments[i]; and

WHEREAS: Pennsylvania taxpayers are subsidizing low wage employers through payments of public supports needed because of inadequate wages; and

WHEREAS: It is unacceptable that such a state of affairs be allowed to continue as, year after year, our elected officials fail to adopt a living wage even with a large majority of Pennsylvanians supporting an increase in the minimum wage[ii]; and

WHEREAS: Denominational members of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches have called for increasing the wage as well[iii]; and

WHEREAS: Over one million Pennsylvania workers (and their families) would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage to at least $10.10/hour[iv]; and

WHEREAS: The cost of living continues to rise, while the minimum wage does not, because neither the federal nor the Pennsylvania minimum wage include a cost of living adjustment. This results in a loss of spending power over time for individuals and families with members holding jobs that pay only minimum wage; and

WHEREAS: Raising the minimum wage is projected to raise much-needed revenues both for Pennsylvania's budget[v] and the federal budget; and

WHEREAS, non-profit agencies that serve the most vulnerable populations will struggle to pay their employees a higher wage because of low government reimbursement rates for the services they provide for these populations; and

WHEREAS, greater government revenues produced by implementation of a higher minimum wage will provide the potential for increasing reimbursement rates to make it possible for non-profit agencies to comply with an increase in the minimum wage for their own employees without layoffs or reduction in services; and

WHEREAS: A day's work is worthy of a living wage—a job should keep our citizens out of poverty, not in it;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED (1): The Pennsylvania Council of Churches urges the Pennsylvania General Assembly and the United States Congress to enact a just, living wage (without a separate minimum wage for tipped workers) that benefits all employed Pennsylvanians and that includes a cost of living adjustment to keep pace with inflation; and be it further

RESOLVED (2): The Council also urges Federal and State governments to increase reimbursement rates to non-profit agencies serving the most vulnerable populations so as to ensure that they are also able to pay the minimum wage without hardship or reduction in services; and be it further

RESOLVED (3): The wage should be appropriate for the cost of living where someone is employed; and be it further

RESOLVED (4): The Pennsylvania General Assembly should not interfere with any community that wishes to set a minimum wage that is higher than the state or federal minimum wage; and be it further

RESOLVED (5): The Council instructs the Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach to communicate this resolution to: (a) the Governor of Pennsylvania, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, the chairs of the appropriate House and Senate Committees, and to all Senators and Representatives in Pennsylvania's General Assembly; and (b) the President, the Speaker of the House, the House Minority Leader, the Majority and Minority Leaders in the Senate, and Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation; and be it further

RESOLVED (6): The Council encourages its member bodies to:

- Seek adherence to denominational resolutions on the minimum wage/living wage similar to this Resolution;
- Provide educational materials and resources to their congregations to make them aware of, and to educate them about, the effects of low wages on the Commonwealth's economy and the health and welfare of its citizens; and
- Encourage congregations and individuals to seek enactment of legislation and policies that seek to increase wages to a living wage level statewide and nationally.

Approved by the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches on this 4th day of April, 2017.

Rev. Elizabeth L. Bidgood Enders

The Rev. Elizabeth Bidgood Enders, President
Board of Directors
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

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[i] http://www.epi.org/publication/declining-federal-minimum-wage-inequality/
[ii] http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2016/06/pennsylvanians-on-drivers-licenses-sports-convenience-stores-and-more.html
[iii] http://www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Principles.pdf, pp. 8-10
[iv] http://keystoneresearch.org/sites/default/files/KRC_PolicyWatch_FallingShort.pdf; $10.10 was used for research purposes. It is not the recommended wage. Raise the Wage PA is recommending $15.00/hour.
[v] http://keystoneresearch.org/Budget1617_wages