



Working to Reduce Poverty in America.

January 8, 2014

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA, we write to express our concern with the ongoing decent jobs crisis as well as the resulting inequality in our communities and country. We urge you to consider closely any legislation that begins to heal our broken economy by promoting decent work and ensuring fair and just compensation for all workers.

We write not as economists or labor market experts, but rather as pastors and teachers who every day, in our ministries and churches, see the pain and struggles caused by an economy that simply does not produce enough jobs with just wages. So many of our families find it increasingly difficult to afford basic needs, forcing some to take multiple jobs or, in desperation, even seek out predatory loans.

Human work has inherent dignity, and just wages honor that dignity. Blessed John Paul II called human work “probably the essential key, to the whole social question” (*Laborem Exercens*, no. 20). We will not speak to the specifics of policies, but can draw from our teaching to offer principles to build a just economy and advance the common good. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “a just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. . . . [It] should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural, and spiritual level” (no. 2434). Just wages allow us to develop more fully as individuals, families, neighborhoods, communities, parishes, and even society as a whole.

The current federal minimum wage falls short of this standard for its failure to provide sufficient resources for individuals to form and support families. A full-year, full-time worker making the minimum wage does not make enough money to raise a child free from poverty. Because the minimum wage is a static number and does not change, each year it becomes more difficult for workers making the minimum wage to survive. Additionally, while some minimum wage workers are teenagers, research suggests as much as 25 percent of workers who would benefit from a minimum wage increase are parents. Workers deserve a just wage that allows them to live in dignity, form and support families, and contribute to the common good.

Pope Francis recently noted, “it is therefore necessary to remove centrality from the law of profit and gain, and to put the person and the common good back at the centre. One very important factor for the dignity of the person is, precisely, work; work must be guaranteed if there is to be an authentic promotion of the person. This task is incumbent on the society as a whole.” We must return the human person to the center of economic life; one way Congress can do that is by ensuring workers receive just wages.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Reverend Larry Snyder
President
Catholic Charities USA