

SENATOR TARTAGLIONE'S FULL REMARKS FROM MINIMUM WAGE NEWS BRIEFING WITH CONGRESSMAN BRENDAN BOYLE

Philadelphia, PA – State Senator Christine Tartaglione (D-Philadelphia) delivered the following remarks today during a news briefing with U.S. Rep. Brendan Boyle to discuss raising the minimum wage.

Good morning!

I'd like to start off by thanking the members of the news media who have joined us today and I'd like to thank Congressman Boyle for being a tremendous partner on this issue that is vital to millions of hard-working Pennsylvanians.

I vividly remember 2 years ago when he and I stood on North Broad Street in Philadelphia and spoke to the news media about the urgency of raising the minimum wage. At the time, I said that people should not have to work 2 or 3 jobs just to make ends meet. That notion still rings true.

Sadly, Pennsylvania's minimum wage workers STILL haven't gotten a raise. For the record, today marks 5,317 days since the Pennsylvania Legislature last raised the Minimum Wage. That is more than 14 YEARS and it is FAR TOO LONG. ...

It is also almost 12 years since Pennsylvania's minimum wage workers have received a raise of any kind – even a nominal raise. In 2009, Congress raised the federal rate to \$7.25 per hour, which was just 10 cents more than the rate in effect in Pennsylvania at the time.

Yet, as we provide this update for you today, we have much reason for hope that 2021 may finally be the year we deliver meaningful financial relief to low-wage earners.

I will soon introduce state legislation known as Senate Bill 12 that would raise the minimum wage and mandate other statutory changes to help working-class Pennsylvania families, as well as their employers and our state's economy.

- *Specifically, SB 12 would raise Pennsylvania's minimum wage to \$12 THIS YEAR*
- *It would increase the rate by 50 cents each year until it reaches \$15.*
- *After 2027, the minimum wage would be tied directly to the Consumer Price Index so that raises take effect automatically each year as prices increase.*

Further, my legislation would end the sub-minimum wage for tip-earners, a policy that permits employers to pay servers, bartenders, and many other categories of workers as little as \$2.83 per hour in base wages.

My legislation would repeal preemption, which prohibits local governments from increasing the minimum wage in their own jurisdictions.

Lastly, Senate Bill 12 would increase the powers of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry to investigate and enforce the state's wage laws. And it would increase the penalties for employers who violate wage laws.

I am hopeful that this legislation will succeed because it comes at a time when public support for raising the minimum wage in Pennsylvania and across the nation has perhaps never been greater. The latest statewide surveys show that 69% of Pennsylvania voters favor a \$12 minimum wage and 56% favor a \$15 minimum wage.

Support for raising the minimum wage will only grow as consumer prices climb and as it becomes increasingly difficult for low-wage earners to pay for necessities like housing, food, healthcare, transportation, and childcare.

We also have reason for hope because of what we saw in Florida last November when 61% of voters approved a statewide referendum for a \$15 minimum wage. Please keep in mind, Florida is a very conservative state politically and it is where 1 of every 5 residents is of retirement age. If \$15 an hour can succeed there, it can succeed anywhere.

I am also very hopeful because more and more Pennsylvanians are starting to see this issue for what it TRULY is – it is both an economic issue AND a MORAL issue.

As I stated two years ago, and have stated many times since then, it is a moral failure of our Commonwealth that we allow conditions to persist where people are working several low-wage jobs just to scrape together enough income to pay the rent, buy groceries, and pay bus fare.

It is a moral failure when we have full-time workers who must turn to taxpayer-funded programs like food stamps and Medicaid. And it is a moral failure that our economic policies don't provide reasonable opportunities for low-wage earners to break the cycle of poverty.

And when I refer to low-wage earners, I want to be perfectly clear about who I am speaking. I'm talking about the 2 million Pennsylvanians who would be directly impacted by Senate Bill 12 – the people who now earn less than \$15 an hour:

- *89% are adults*
- *55% are working full-time*

- *37% are 40 or older*
- *61% are women*
- *27% are people of color*
- *24% are parents*

- *And 41% have at least some college education*

On average, an affected worker earns 49% of their family's income and an affected teenage worker earns 21% of their family's income.

They are single parents and seniors on limited incomes, trying to cover their prescription costs. They are heads of households and they are young adults from families where everyone must chip in to keep the household afloat.

Many are our frontline workers who employers paid extra money – hazard pay – during the early days of the pandemic when all other businesses were closed, but from whom those funds were taken when businesses were allowed to reopen.

Approximately 2 million workers will benefit directly from my legislation, and many workers who already make a little bit more than the minimum are likely to benefit as pay scales shift upward.

Critics of the minimum wage often say that raising the rate will cause many low-wage earners to lose their jobs. To that I say, my legislation would enable many low-wage workers to leave their second and third jobs, spend more time with their children, go back to school, or learn a trade. They will be able to improve their lives and their earning potential.

What's more, history tells us that raising the minimum wage has NOT produced the harmful results as often predicted by critics.

Since 2014, 29 states and dozens of cities have raised the minimum wage above \$7.25. This has been happening for many years. Yet, until the pandemic, the nation's unemployment rate was at a 50-year low and we were experiencing the longest period of sustained economic growth in history.

In 2006, when my legislation raised Pennsylvania's minimum wage to \$7.15 an hour, the critics said it would kill businesses. They were wrong then, and they will be wrong now.

Actually, raising the minimum wage benefits businesses. We are living in a consumer-driven economy and workers are our primary consumers. As they earn more money, they spend it. Raising the minimum wage is an economic stimulus in this regard.

The minimum wage levels the playing field for businesses as they compete with one-another and it helps them improve employee retention, which leads to better employee performance and productivity.

Finally, before I invite Congressman Boyle to deliver his remarks, I want to comment on one of the most important components of Senate Bill 12 – repealing the preemption clause.

Senate Bill 12 would restore the power of local governments to raise the local minimum wage above the statewide rate. It would give places like Philadelphia, where 82% of voters supported a \$15 minimum wage ballot question in 2019, the ability to raise the minimum wage to meet the needs of the local workforce.

With that, I would like to introduce my friend and partner, Congressman Brendan Boyle, for his remarks on minimum wage.

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