

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE and ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD

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February 19, 2009

Representative Kurt Olson
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 29 Raising Alaska's Minimum Wage

Dear Representative Olson,

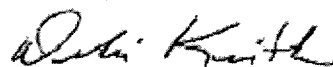
The Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and Alaska Mental Health Board appreciate your recognition of the need for an increase to Alaska's minimum wage. While the proposed increase to minimum wage does not alleviate all the problems faced by Alaska's working poor, it would help low-wage workers better provide for their families. Many of these low-wage workers are people experiencing mental illness or in recovery from mental illness or addiction, so we support moving minimum wage closer to a meaningful wage.

Despite arguments that raising minimum wage endangers small businesses and the jobs they provide — or that minimum wage is only paid to entry-level positions from which workers quickly graduate to a higher wage — research by the Economic Policy Institute shows “no significant job loss associated with the 1996-1997 [federal] minimum wage increase.” Instead, low-wage labor markets performed better after the minimum wage was increased.

Of low-wage workers, women and minority workers benefit most from an increase in minimum wage. Among low-income families with children, low-wage workers contribute over half of the family income — which means that raising the minimum wage will benefit the more than 19,000 Alaskan children living in poverty.

It is not just teenagers working for spending money who hold minimum wage jobs in Alaska. Parents, seniors trying to supplement their limited income, individuals experiencing disabilities, and students putting themselves through school are all represented in the low-wage labor market. Their work is a valuable part of our economy, and should be recognized as such. Thank you for your work, and please let us know if the Alaska Mental Health Board and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse can assist in the effort to pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Debi Keith, Chair
AMHB



Lonnie Walters, Chair
ABADA