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JOCASTA ZAMARRIPA
ALDERWOMAN, 8TH DISTRICT

Moving the \$15 minimum wage forward

Statement of Alderwoman JoCasta Zamarripa June 30, 2021

Mayor Barrett and Alderwoman Lewis are to be recognized and commended for moving to increase the minimum wage for City employees to \$15 per hour. I was happy to sign on as a co-sponsor to today's communication file on the matter heard during the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting. But now we must tackle the challenge of establishing a \$15 wage floor for all workers in Milwaukee, particularly our essential workers and service sector employees in the hospitality, tourism and entertainment industries.

All workers deserve a living wage, and \$15 is an important step toward that. While state pre-emption laws prohibit the City from establishing a wage floor of \$15 for private sector workers, we must use every tool available to balance labor market bargaining power and raise wages.

Just as \$15 per hour as a down payment on a living wage is good for City workers, along with those who have been fighting for and winning this standard, it should be good for the service sector workers on whose labor our city operates.

I look forward to working with Mayor Barrett and my Council colleagues to take concrete action with the tools at our disposal in order to establish a \$15 wage floor for all Milwaukee workers. While not necessarily a definitive list, we can take the following steps this year to advance the cause of living wages for Milwaukee workers:

- Endorse and register in support of LRB 3932/1, state legislation introduced not only to raise the minimum wage in Wisconsin to \$15 and index it to inflation, but also to restore local control over wage standards so the City of Milwaukee can take further action.
- Bring together representatives of employers and workers from key industries to discuss recommended wage standards and means to apply them across sectors through "wage advisory commissions" focused on essential service sector workers and on the service sector within the hospitality, entertainment and tourism industries.
- Adopt a responsible contractor ordinance that ensures sub-contracted service sector work in commercial real estate, large-scale retail, and major institutional settings within Milwaukee is performed by employees of responsible contractors who are highly likely to pay decent wages.

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- Support the development of a “labor market intermediary” in industries experiencing workforce challenges that can be addressed by employment standards and workforce coordination between employers and workers.

These tangible, specific steps come out of the local movement for \$15, and a union, which won actual victories for Milwaukee workers and changed the conversation locally, statewide and nationally.

At a time of a substantial wage shortage and urgent necessity to shore up the workforce amongst essential workers and those in the hospitality, entertainment and tourism industries, we must take all steps to balance labor market power and raise wages. We must also tackle the long-term challenges of low-wage work prevalence in our city that gives rise to our crisis of economic and racial inequality and injustice.

I believe that my Council colleagues and Mayor Barrett have recognized the need to move toward \$15 wage standards for all workers, from the hundreds employed by the City to the thousands in our local service sector industries, and now we are breaking through to do just that.

Let us make this a year of action toward living wages for all Milwaukee workers.

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