

Testimony in Support of Bill Classifying as Employees Those Who Work in Domestic Service, Qualifying Them to be Paid the Minimum Wage: HB7049

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Hector Perez-Aponte, Policy Analyst, the Economic Progress Institute

The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative Felix’s HB7532, which would require domestic workers to be paid at least minimum wage by ending the exclusion of individuals who work as domestic workers from the legal definition of an “employee” in Rhode Island statute.

Rhode Islanders value hard work and fairness, and we all deserve to earn a living wage. There is no compelling reason to maintain the existing employment distinction for domestic workers. Indeed, under current law, Rhode Island’s approximately 5,371 domestic workers, who often work long hours, can be subject to low wages and deductions for room and board from already low wages¹. Many of them work for multiple employers and need to schedule several jobs in a week just to meet basic needs. Often, their work may involve childcare, delivering critical services to older adults and people with disabilities by providing on-hands health care, running errands, making meals and cleaning homes so that these individuals may live independently. Ensuring domestic workers are paid (at least) minimum wage would also improve equity in Rhode Island, because women and people of color tend to disproportionately be employed as domestic workers. Domestic workers are essential to our economy, yet they are some of the most vulnerable and marginalized workers.

By classifying these individuals as employees – which is what they are – these individuals would qualify to be paid the state’s minimum wage. Furthermore, it will end longstanding exemptions from employment laws. In previous years the House Committee on Labor has voted to pass this bill. We ask once more for passage of this legislation.

¹ 1 See Table 4 from Asha Banerjee, Katherine deCourcy, Kyle K. Moore, and Julia Wolfe, “Domestic Workers Chartbook 2022: A comprehensive look at the demographics, wages, benefits, and poverty rates of the professionals who care for our family members and clean our homes,” Economic Policy Institute, November 22, 2022, <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-2022/>.