

September 25, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC, 20500

Dear Mr. President,

With a stroke of your pen you could sign an executive order guaranteeing a living wage for millions of low-wage workers who serve the public in federal buildings in Washington DC and at federal sites around the nation. As leaders of faith communities we value the inherent dignity of work and believe that just and living wages are a moral imperative.

Every year thousands upon thousands of people travel to the nation's capital to visit the historic places where our common history was forged and our character as a nation was shaped. Many of them pass through Union Station on their way to the iconic buildings that make up the Smithsonian, the Ronald Reagan building and other treasured sites throughout Washington DC. The workers who serve them and clean the buildings they visit are paid so poorly they can barely afford basic needs; they work without benefits and are too often not compensated for overtime in violation of federal law. Wal-Mart does not employ the largest number of low-wage workers in the United States, Uncle Sam does.

We have visited with some of these workers who have begun organizing against the "poverty pay" they receive. They work for businesses under federal contracts that distance the federal government from the workers and leave them vulnerable to immoral, exploitative, and often illegal practices. Taxpayers assume the costs of health insurance, food stamps and other benefits that would be unnecessary if companies on federal contracts were held accountable for ethical business practices. The federal government washes its hands of responsibility for the plight of these workers. It could set the standard for the just and equitable treatment of working people who want to share in God's vision of abundant life for all.

Tourists have great experiences, and premium space in federal buildings is fully occupied by vendors making enormous profits, their executives especially. Only low-wage workers suffer serving the public on government property. The writer of Ecclesiastes asks, "What gain have the workers from their toil?" From the Quran, "Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things they are due." In the New Testament, Jesus asks that we see him when we encounter the "least of these who are my family." These concerns are fundamentally moral and human rights issues that our faith compels us to address. All religions believe in justice.

Ana Julia Fuentes has worked as a janitor at Union Station for 23 years and makes \$8.75 an hour. Wilfredo Reyes Lopez is a recent widower with three children living together in a single bedroom. He's a cook in the Reagan building making \$6.50 an hour. Ana Salvador

has worked at McDonald's at the Air and Space Museum for 11 years. She's a single mother with four kids getting SNAP benefits and Medicaid. Jonathan Ross is a single father making \$9.71 an hour at a restaurant in the Smithsonian Institute's American History Museum. He's had three raises in four years, none more than \$.15.

Mr. President, we'll bring them to meet you and to ask that you sign an executive order insuring that federal contractors pay a living wage and respect the rights of workers. It will help these workers and the millions of others like them throughout our nation and you will set a standard that all employers can follow. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best, "All labor has dignity." President Lyndon B. Johnson issued an executive order in 1965 banning discrimination by the government and government contractors against their work force. President Johnson's bold action set a new standard of racial non-discrimination in the workforce. Today, you have the same authority to ensure that government contracts set the living wage as a standard of justice for employment across the country. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person as soon as possible to talk and pray together that our government might do the right thing.

"All labor has dignity." Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Grace and peace,

Mr. Nihad Awad, Executive Director, Council on American Islamic Relations
Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Armenian Orthodox Church
Mr. Naeem Baig, President, Islamic Circle of North America
Dr. Carroll A. Baltimore, Sr., President, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
The Rev. Geoffrey Black, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ
Rabbi Rick Block, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis
The Rev. Jennifer Butler, CEO, Faith in Public Life
Ms. Kim Bobo, Executive Director, Interfaith Worker Justice
Sr. Simone Campbell, Executive Director, NETWORK
Dr. Iva Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel Proctor Conference
Rabbi Maria J. Feldman, Executive Director, Women of Reform Judaism
The Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church in the USA
Bishop Thomas J. Hoyt, Senior Bishop, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Ms. Lynn Magid Lazar, President, Women of Reform Judaism
The Rev. Carlos Malave, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together
The Rev. Michael Livingston, National Policy Director, Interfaith Worker Justice;
Former President, National Council of Churches
Bishop W. Darin Moore, Presiding Bishop, Western Episcopal District &
NC Conference, AMEZ Church
The Rev. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition
Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Dr. Sayyid Syeed, National Director, Islamic Society of North America
The Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Thurston, President, National Baptist Convention of
America, Inc. International

Alan van Capelle, Chief Executive Officer, Bend the Arc

The Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church
Disciples of Christ

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, President, The Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church