



The Wages Act

H.R. 631

Background:

The minimum wage for tipped workers has been frozen for two decades, since 1991. If it had kept pace with its 1991 value, today it would be \$4.35/hr. While employers are required make up the difference between tips and the minimum wage, workers rely on their base hourly wage as a source of steady income in an industry where tips can fluctuate widely depending on the day, season, and economic conditions.

Since the start of the recession, people are eating out less and tipping less generously than usual. Those who work for tips, including those in the restaurant and other industries, have been devastated by the erosion of the value of their minimum wage.

Restaurant workers are the largest group of tipped workers, and they have been hit hard by the stagnant minimum wage. Nearly 15% of all waiters and waitresses live below the federal poverty level, compared to less than 6% of the workforce as a whole.

Minority populations are particularly hard hit. According to the Census Bureau, over 22% of African-American tipped employees and 18% of Latino tipped employees live in families that are below the federal poverty level.

The Wages Act:

This groundbreaking bill, introduced by **Rep. Donna Edwards (D-MD)** makes progress toward closing the wage gap that currently exists between tipped employees and all other workers. It would do this in three steps:

1. Raise the minimum wage of tipped employees from the current level of \$2.13 per hour to \$3.75 per hour three months after enactment.
2. Raise the minimum wage of tipped employees to \$5.00 per hour one year after its enactment.
3. After the second year, the tipped minimum wage would be restored to its original rate of 70% of minimum wage (as enacted during the 1930's), but no less than \$5.50 per hour.



Winning
Justice *for*
Working
Women

The Wages Act H.R. 631

TAKE ACTION -- Call, e-mail, or fax your legislator today!

1. Write a letter to your Senators and Representatives. See the sample below and add any of your own personal experience and words.
2. Call the capitol Switchboard 202-224-3121 and ask to be connected with your Senators and Representative.
3. Visit www.vote-smart.org or www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find the names and contact information for your U.S. Senators and U.S. Representative.

Sample Letter

Date _____
Senator/ Representative _____
US Senate/ House of Representatives
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator/Representative _____,

I am a registered voter in your district and am writing in support of WAGES Act (HR 631). This bill would raise the federal minimum wage for tipped workers from the current \$2.13/hr to \$5.50/hr over several years.

Although Congress raised the minimum wage in 2007, the minimum wage for tipped workers has been frozen since for *two decades*, since 1991. If it had kept pace with its 1991 value, today it would be \$4.35/hr. While employers are required to make up the difference between tips and the minimum wage, workers rely on base wages paid by an employer for steady income in an industry where tips fluctuate widely depending on the day, week, and season.

Since the start of the current recession, people are eating out less and tipping less generously than usual. As a result, 15% of waiters and waitresses live below the federal poverty level compared to 6% of the rest of the workforce. As anyone who has ever waited tables will tell you, it is intensely physical and difficult work.

Add your own experience of caring for your own family's health, or that of family, friends, and co-workers here.

It is time to make sure all employees are paid fair wages for their hard work, and that the nation's largest workforce is not left out of the federal minimum wage increase.

I urge you to support the WAGES Act and work actively for its passage. I would appreciate knowing your position on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Your name _____
Address _____

9to5 is building a movement to achieve economic justice, by engaging directly affected women to improve working conditions. For more information about your rights on the job, contact the 9to5 Job Survival Helpline at 1-800-522-0925 or helpline@9to5.org or go to 9to5.org. Follow 9to5 on [facebook.com/9to5.org](https://www.facebook.com/9to5.org) and twitter.com/#!/9to5.org for updates and action alerts.