NELP Applauds President Obama’s Call for Policies to Sustain Working Families

Statement of Christine Owens, Executive Director, National Employment Law Project

“While the state of the union may be getting stronger, the state of America’s working families remains precarious, as wages have stagnated over the past three decades and working parents struggle to provide and care for their families.

“So tonight, we welcome President Obama’s support for paid family leave, stronger labor unions, and greater access to apprentice programs—proposals that will help ensure that workers can achieve economic security through work and better balance the competing demands of work and family. We also applaud the President’s commitment to addressing the wage crisis with updated overtime-pay rules and a higher federal minimum wage.

“Since the last State of the Union, President Obama has provided strong leadership on raising the minimum wage, aggressively calling for state and local action to sidestep a paralyzed Congress. In 2015, we reached a tipping point: for the first time, a majority of states—29, plus the District of Columbia—have minimum wage rates that are higher than the shamefully low federal rate of $7.25.

“We’ve spent decades going backwards on the minimum wage, and we don’t need to continue down that path. The number-one economic crisis facing America’s workers is the wage crisis, and we will not effectively address it until we take bold and meaningful steps to raise the minimum wage to a level that restores its historic value and ensures that workers at the bottom of the wage scale can live at least as well in 2015 as they did in 1968.

“The American people have the President’s back on this issue. They overwhelmingly support wages well above the rates being proposed in Congress. Seventy-five percent of Americans—including 53 percent of Republicans—support an increase in the federal minimum wage to $12.50 by 2020, and 71 percent of Americans believe the minimum wage for tipped workers (currently $2.13 an hour) should be raised to the same level as for all other workers, according to a poll released last week by Hart Research Associates. The same poll also showed that 63 percent of Americans support an even greater minimum wage increase to $15.00 by 2020.

“Certainly, the economy is improving. But we must not forget those left behind in the recovery—the millions of Americans who are still struggling with long-term unemployment, and the millions more who want full-time work but are barely making it on part-time jobs that don’t pay enough. We need to raise wages, especially at the low end of the labor market, so working people are paid enough to cover their expenses, spend money in their communities, and strengthen our economy.

“If 2014 was the year of putting people back to work, 2015 should be the year of raising their pay. We hope that the President and Congress can heed the will of the American people and raise the federal minimum wage.”
The National Employment Law Project is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and advocates on issues affecting low-wage and unemployed workers. For more about NELP, visit www.nelp.org and wwwraisetheminimumwage.org.