

To: NYS Wage Board

From: Erin Leidy, Pizza Delivery Driver, Dryden, NY

Re: Testimony Regarding Issue of 'Tipped Workers' in Service Industries

Date: October 3, 2014

My name is Erin Leidy and I work as a delivery driver for a pizzeria in Ithaca, NY. I studied English at Cornell University, which is how I ended up living in Ithaca. When I was choosing my major I knew that I was not taking a route that would easily lead to financial abundance. However, when I graduated from High School in 1997 I never would have pictured myself at the age of 35 working for less than minimum wage at a job I could have done without that diploma. Alas, this is where I am. On paper I have very little to distinguish me from other job candidates in Ithaca who all have similar interests and educational backgrounds, sometimes with even more appealing majors. So most of the jobs I have done since college have been in the food and transportation industries. This makes me well qualified for my present position and when I returned from a year of unsuccessfully trying to transition to New York City, where I hoped my association with Cornell would make me more employable, delivery driving was an easy job to get.

At first I only worked weekends when I could borrow a car from my family and after a few months I purchased my own vehicle which allowed me to be more flexible in the shifts I could take. By then it was summer and hours were scarce but at that point my only bills related to my car as I was splitting my time between couch surfing in Ithaca and periodically going to my parents house some 80 miles away. So I didn't need much and the situation was acceptable as something temporary. By the time the weather got cold I was needed by my grandmother who has had some health issues and that reduced my hours again. At the end of the spring she was doing better and I started making arrangements to find permanent housing in the Ithaca area. I rented a room over the summer and signed a lease for an apartment in Dryden in August.

None of this would have been possible to do if I only had access to what I was making at my job. My parents have been incredibly generous and helpful. The unfortunate truth though is that even now that the students are back and I have the chance to work something more like a full time schedule, it seems to not be possible to make ends meet with what I make at my job. The numbers just don't work. As a delivery driver I make an hourly rate of \$6 and my tips vary from literally a few dollars on a slow weekday shift to as much as \$75 on a very busy weekend shift where I'm on the clock for 10-11 hours. If all my shifts were like the latter there wouldn't be much of a problem (or at least it would be possible for the numbers to work). But unfortunately there are only so many of those to go around and clearly all the other drivers want to work them

too so I usually only get one very lucrative shift a week. Keep in mind that kind of shift didn't exist in the summer but during the school year with the hours I am going to be getting now I can assume that I might be able to work as much as 30 hours a week. With one shift being very good in terms of tips and the other 2 or 3 being poor to middling. Before taxes I will make about \$180 from my hourly wage and if I am lucky possibly as much as \$150 in tips but that is often lower. This means in a month, before I pay taxes I am going to be bringing in a little more than \$1300.

\$1300 is much more than I have had coming in at other times in the past and I'm grateful to have it but lets just see how far that goes. My rent for my one bedroom apartment is \$675 a month. This is much less than I would pay if I lived in Ithaca. When I was looking for a place I looked there, of course, since that's where I have spent most of my adult life, but the average one bedroom apartment in Ithaca is more like \$850 or \$900 a month. Reluctantly I looked in the neighboring towns and even though I would prefer to be close to work and my friends I couldn't pass up the lower rent. Even still by the time I pay for my other expenses I won't have anything left over. The total I need monthly to cover my car payment, car insurance, nyseg (based on the historical averages for this unit) and internet bills amounts to \$516. I spend more in gas than most people because I use my car for work. Weekly that ends up being in the \$75-\$100 range. The more I work the more I will use. That means my monthly expenses come to at least \$1491 before I buy any food or socks or soap or anything else I need or put anything in to the extra wear and tear on my car.

If you're paying attention you probably noticed that this is more than I am bringing in. Even though I like the people I work for and this job is better than many others I've had I'm looking for something different. Something where my income is not based on the whims of the public. A public that, in Ithaca, is made up largely of college students who don't have much money to spend and for the most part have not had to make a household budget like mine work, ever. If it weren't for my parents I'd have no hope of getting by for however long it takes me to find either a second job or one full-time job that I can pay my bills on. I have the luxury of having only one mouth to feed and tastes that allow me to spend very little and still keep myself clothed, fed and entertained. If I find another job in the same industry I will end up having the option of working 7 days a week to pay my meager bills and possibly losing my medicaid which I absolutely need to survive, so is that really even an option? The only really good possibility is finding a position where I make enough to pay my bills and have benefits too. But I've been looking for a job like that for 12 years and haven't managed to get one so I'm not sure how likely it is that I will find one in the next few months.

I have many ideas for making changes in my life, some are realistic and some are fanciful. I'm open to a very broad range of possibilities and I'm actively seeking them. I'm sure eventually something will come through. As hard as it was to believe I'd be in this situation at 35, even now after the life experience I've gained since I first came to Central New York, it's even harder for

me to envision myself doing the same kind of work at 65. It seems almost inevitable that with my advantages I will find a way to improve my situation. But whether I do that next week or next year or in 5 years there will be somebody else working the job I leave when I do so. And there are thousands of others working in the same kinds of jobs now. Many of them don't have the hope of finding different work and will be relying on this well in to middle age if not until retirement. In order to change the outlook for me and them now and for all the people who will be doing these jobs well in to the future it is vital that New York State make moves to support tipped workers and truly create wealth that will ripple out through the local communities in to every corner of the state. Other states and cities that have raised the minimum wage have seen this far reaching effect and contrary to what opponents of raising the minimum wage to a living wage claim, the benefits have been clear. This isn't even experimental at this stage. It's just plainly good economic sense to put money in to the hands of the people who are working hard and will be spending it all over their communities to get the goods and services they need. There are few other single legislative acts that would positively effect so many constituents and by extension the economy of the entire state. The next move is clear. Thank you.

