**The $15 Minimum Wage Is a Moral Imperative**

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Of all the seniors that Alimamy Barrie has cared for, he was closest to a Korean War veteran and former police officer, who relied on a wheelchair due to injuries from his service.

“We became so close, it was like taking care of an older brother,” says Alimamy, a home health aide in the New York City borough of Staten Island. “When you are lifting your patient out of bed, bathing them, dressing them and monitoring their vital signs, you know more about their physical and emotional state than their family members and doctors.”

Alimamy earns only $10 an hour for his critically important work, but he says the rewards go beyond monetary value.

“We are not just caring for the physical aspect of our patients, we are lifting up their entire existence. We laugh with them, make them happy and protect them from the dark loneliness that a lot of seniors can fall victim to. You need to be filled with kindness to be a homecare worker. It’s very tough work, but it is a gift from God.”

Alimamy and his wife, who is also a homecare worker, face a daily struggle to support themselves and feed their five children. He is 67 years old, not much younger than his clients, but won’t be able to retire anytime soon, because his low wages have prevented him from saving money.

Poverty pay has forced 56% of New York homecare workers to rely on public assistance, including 30% who are on food stamps. There are tens of thousands of other healthcare workers throughout the state’s nursing homes, clinics, hospitals and pharmacies who also make less than $15 and are struggling to survive.

Because of the hardships workers like Alimamy face, Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed raising the minimum wage to $15 by the end of 2018 in New York City and by mid-2021 in the rest of the state. More than three million working New Yorkers would get a raise from the $15 minimum wage, or 36% of the workforce. These workers include nurse assistants, childcare workers, airport workers, security guards and even adjunct professors. 95% of New Yorkers who make less than $15 are over the age of 20 and 66% work full-time, according to a recent study.

Over 200 economists, including seven Nobel Prize winners, have said that raising the minimum wage would be an economic driver for the state. That is why 85 small and large businesses, along with business groups like the Greater New York Chamber of Commerce, support Governor Cuomo’s proposal.

But raising the minimum wage is not just about boosting the economy. At its core, this is about what kind of city, state and country we want to be. The great promise of the American Dream is that if you work hard, contribute productively to society and play by the rules, you will be able to build a better life for you and your children.

By raising the minimum wage to $15, New Yorkers can lead our entire nation toward a more just future where hard work is rewarded with fair pay. It is our hope that New York state legislators share this same respect for hard work, and will pass the $15 minimum wage by the end of this month.

***George Gresham is President of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East and Chair of the Mario Cuomo Campaign for Economic Justice.***