



Testimony
HB 1716 - Providing living wages on public contracts
House Committee on Commerce & Labor
February 13, 2009

Chairman Conway and members of the Committee, my name is Kim Sheley and I am here today to testify on behalf of the Washington State Catholic Conference, which represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State on issues of public policy.

The Catholic Conference supports HB 1716, providing living wages on public contracts. Our Catholic faith reflects God's special concern for the poor and vulnerable and calls us to make their needs our first priority in public life.

Catholic Church teaching on economic justice insists that economic decisions and institutions be assessed on whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. We support policies that create jobs with decent working conditions and adequate pay that reflects a living wage.

Our support for this bill presumes that contractors with the state receive adequate funding to provide living wages. For example, presently, the state contracts with organizations to provide childcare for state clients. The reimbursement rate is more than 50% below costs. This works a severe hardship on organizations that partner with the state, and some have had to stop providing childcare services. In order to provide living wages, contracts must include the funding for them.

Moreover, in order to achieve fairness, we do support efforts to overcome barriers to just wages. We believe that wages should allow workers to support their families, and allow them to live in dignity.

Thank you for your consideration.