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March 31, 2015

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Statement on Raising the Minimum Wage

I would like to thank Supervisors Sheila Kuehl and Hilda Solis for their motion to study the impact of raising the minimum wage in Los Angeles County.

This decision to contract the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation to take a deeper look at the minimum wage will permit the Board of Supervisors to begin a discussion about what we can do to address wage stagnation. Over the past 40 years, wages and salaries have remained stagnant while overall productivity and profitability of U.S. enterprises has steadily increased.

Academics, the media and policy makers have lamented the impact of wage stagnation on the standard of living and quality of life for the middle class. And yet, no one seems to know what to do about it.

As a Board, we are responsible for providing a safety net by bringing services to County residents living in, at or near poverty. That is our mandate.

We are seeing an increase in the number of workers who are unable to make ends meet without safety net services and income support such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for food, Medicaid for health coverage and Section 8 for housing.

But due to the increasing number of people in need, policy makers at the state and federal level suggest the cost of assistance to these workers is unsustainable.

Some suggest that such services promote a culture of dependency. Others suggest that these services provide a subsidy to employers who fail to pay their workers enough to live on, giving businesses an incentive to keep compensation low.

I would like the analysis to study the impact that raising or lowering the minimum wage will have on productivity, profitability and safety net expenditures.

Finally, as the region's largest employer, I believe Los Angeles County should lead the way in establishing a living wage for its contract workers. The County must set its own house in order first by establishing equitable pay and standards that are based on actual costs of living, healthcare and what it costs to raise a family in Los Angeles. I will continue to work towards ensuring our contract workers' needs are addressed.

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