

## Statement of Carolle Fleurio

**March 14, 2013**

Good morning Senator Harkin, Senator Alexander, and members of this Committee. My name is Carolle Fleurio and I thank you for inviting me to share my personal story. I also want to thank Senator Harkin and all the other Senators who are supporting the Fair Minimum Wage Act, which would not only raise the minimum wage, but guarantee that workers like me would get yearly raises that keep up with the cost of living.

For the last seven years I have worked as cook at a family restaurant in Stockbridge, Georgia. This restaurant is a place people love to go to. People have meetings there; families come to socialize and catch up with each other. It is a place where people come to feel at home and comfortable while enjoying a meal. Being a cook means that I am the one who helps make these experiences possible.

Although I enjoy my job, it's difficult to support a family on \$8/hr. My husband is both retired and disabled, which means he is unable to work. His social security check is barely enough to pay for car insurance for myself and our two daughters, our life insurance policies, and his medical needs. My paycheck has to pay for everything else.

I am responsible for the mortgage, water, light, garbage, gas, food, and all other household expenses. I provide a home for myself, my husband, my two daughters, my granddaughter, and my niece. I have family back home in Haiti who cannot find jobs. I should be able to provide for them, but I am unable to.

When I started out at this restaurant I earned \$6.85/hr. I have gotten several small raises. However the cost of milk and gas keeps going up. Even though I'm not getting ahead, these raises keep me and my family from falling too far behind the cost of living. Many people I know don't even get those small raises. That just doesn't seem right.

Some months, my wages just aren't enough to cover our expenses, even though I try very hard to keep our bills as low as possible. I have to make hard choices on which bills will be paid and which bills will just have to wait. Some months we simply can't pay the mortgage on time. This is very stressful for all of us. My husband and I must keep a roof over the head of all of our family. It takes a toll on our health when we get behind on this important bill.

I am also unable to provide much for my youngest daughter who is in graduate school. She has to work many hours, earning less than I do per hour, to provide for herself. I would love for her to just be able to focus on her schooling, or to work fewer hours, so she can study more.

If the minimum wage were to go up \$1 or \$2 that would make a huge change in my life. Not only would it help our family be better able to meet our basic needs, but it would also help when I get sick.

I have no paid sick or personal days, so when I'm feeling really sick, I have to decide if I have enough money that week to stay home, or if I must go in anyway. With more pay, on those few days a year when I am sick, I could stay home and get better, rather than exposing my co-workers and our customers to my germs. I've also not had a vacation in 7 years, because we cannot afford to go without my pay. With a raise like the one the Fair Minimum Wage Act would provide, I could take a few days off in the year and have some rest time with my family.

It's also very important to me that this bill includes an increase every year, to match the rise in the cost of living. That would be a real blessing. The cost of groceries and utilities goes up every year. Knowing that even a small raise is coming would help us plan for these costs. It would give us more security, more peace of mind, a bit of a cushion for sickness, emergencies, or just the regular expenses of life.

Because I don't get paid time off, even after 7 years on my job, I had to think hard about losing a day's pay to come to Washington, to speak in support of this bill. I'm here today because it is that important for my family – and for the millions of families like mine that work hard every day, but still earn enough at low-wage jobs to cover the basic necessities of life.

I hope that Congress will pass this important bill. For me, and for the millions of other minimum wage workers around the county, it would mean happiness, joy and peace.