

# NY Communities for Change

Good afternoon my name is Jose Hernandez and I'm a member of New York Communities for Change. I immigrated to this country from Dominican Republic 5 years ago. Back home I was able to study and worked under the president and under the administration of the mayor of Santo Domingo. I was a supervisor, and earned an average of \$220 a month, and even though this was considered a good job, it wasn't enough to survive on. Because of my circumstances I had to migrate to this country like many of my co-workers, seeking a better future for my family. My first job in Brooklyn was working at a bodega. I used to work 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, for \$300. This means I was earning \$4.17 an hour! With these wages I had to pay \$940 a month in rent, bills, transportation and food, plus I sent \$200 back to my family in DR. After all my expenses I had \$200 a month for any personal expenses. Today, 5 years later I work at a Latin Food Restaurant as a cook's assistant. I work 48-60 hours a week for \$300. Or, rather I earn \$6.25 an hour. Five years later the rent, food, and transportation costs have gone up, but I'm still earning the same wages. I work hard and my wages are low, how can I survive like this? Just to put it in perspective, I remember a couple of months ago; I had to run some errands with a friend of mine. We were out all day, and when we got hungry we found a place to eat. I had \$100 with me, part of the money that I use for my monthly personal expenses. I thought \$100 would be more than enough, so we didn't check the prices. I was shocked when we got the bill of \$86 dollars, and didn't know what to do. The experience of that day will be with me forever, I will never forget how I spent the money that was supposed to last me at least two weeks, all in one day. Now, in order to make sure this doesn't happen to me again, I think twice before eating out. I feel depressed and frustrated, how is it possible that five years later I'm working harder than ever and I'm barely surviving. In New York I have to work every waking hour, I have to calculate every dollar, every cent I spend. Other workers like me are in the same situation, and we need \$15 an hour. For me being able to earn a decent wage would mean that I wouldn't have to work so many hours. I would be able to walk into a restaurant and eat when I'm hungry without worrying about the check. We aren't asking for a lot, only what is fair. \$15 is a good start, but we need a minimum wage that increases as the cost of living goes up. No one should have to live through this, working so hard to have a dignified life. Thank you.