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October 24, 2016

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors/Co Clerk of the Board
Office of the Clerk - Board of Supervisors
70 West Hedding Street, 10th Floor, East Wing
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Santa Clara County Living Wage Ordinance

SEIU Local 521 strongly supports Santa Clara County's efforts to fully implement a Living Wage Policy that covers nonprofit employers contracting with the county. As the county's largest labor union, we represent thousands of behavioral, primary and specialty health care and social service workers. SEIU membership spans the county and includes workers both in the public sector and in nonprofit community based organizations. Our members are on the frontline providing critical services to residents who rely on the local safety net. We share the county's commitment to reducing inequality and improving social, health and economic outcomes of our clients.

It is well documented that Silicon Valley is one of the most expensive regions in the country to live. Working families struggle to be able to afford to work and live here. Too often they confront impossible choices such as choosing between paying for health insurance and paying the rent. We are facing an exodus of highly qualified and dedicated staff as a direct result of the exorbitant cost of living in Santa Clara County.

Fully implementing the Living Wage Policy for nonprofit contractors will be a critical step in improving and stabilizing the lives of thousands of working families in Santa Clara County. Furthermore, we know that when workers are paid less than a living wage, costs are shifted to the public sector and county taxpayers.

It is worth noting that in areas where workers are paid a living wage with access to basic benefits such as health insurance, employers see broad-based improvements in quality of work and services. This includes reduced turnover,

training costs, and fewer vacancies. Not only does a living wage improve job satisfaction and morale, it also ensures retention of a qualified workforce. The important bottom line is that there is greater quality and continuity of care for clients. The rapid and continuous changes in health care and social services, including the increased emphasis on improving quality and health outcomes, makes workforce stability more critical than ever. A fully implemented Living Wage Policy will be an important tool in helping the county achieve these goals.

Having a true voice on the job results in higher quality services, especially in behavioral health, primary care, and social services. In the nonprofit sector workers are mission-driven and dedicated to the services they provide. As such, we support the full implementation of labor peace into the Living Wage Policy. The Community Child Care Council of Santa Clara County (4Cs) is a prime example; when frontline workers are not allowed a voice on the job, the performance of the agency suffers and families are negatively impacted.

Finally, experience shows that Living Wage Policies are only successful when paired with a transparent, fair and strong enforcement policy. We ask the county to commit to a robust plan that includes a dedicated enforcement department, funded positions and a clear mandate to enforce the provisions of the Living Wage Ordinance, Policy, and other county workforce standards.

We thank the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors for this opportunity to work together to implement a truly comprehensive Living Wage Policy for all county contractors, including nonprofits. Our hope is that, together, we can develop a policy that improves the lives and economic security of working families, ensures workers have a true voice on the job, and increases the quality of critical services that these safety-net workers provide Santa Clara County residents.

Sincerely,



Kristina M. Sermersheim

Chief Elected Officer

SEIU Local 521