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On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose over 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents over 2,000 Reform rabbis, we submit these questions regarding the nomination of Alexander Acosta as Secretary of Labor. We urge Committee Members to make use of them during his nomination hearing.

The Reform Movement is the largest denomination in American Jewish life and strongly advocates for policies that reflect the dignity of all workers as well as a commitment to ensuring workers' safety and well-being. To that end, we strongly support workers' rights to organize and to bargain collectively, support increasing the federal minimum wage, work to closing the persistent gender wage gap, and advocate for a national standard of paid leave.

Our Jewish tradition has a strong tradition of supporting the right to employment with dignity. We are taught in the Torah, "You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). Later tradition expands on this teaching by addressing not only wages but also working conditions. The rabbis of the Talmud taught in the case in which an employer says to workers, "I raised your wages in order that you would begin early and stay late," they may reply, "You raised our wages in order that we would do better work" (Baba Metzia 83a).

Working Families Policies

1. [A recent study](#) indicates that over half of all food-service workers say that they "always" or "frequently" attend work when they have an illness. Employees typically go to work because they cannot afford to lose a much-needed paycheck. Having an unwell employee is an issue that not only affects their coworkers, but also represents a public health crisis. [A Centers on Disease Control report](#) found that 70% of norovirus outbreaks from contaminated food stem from workers who are ill. What policies do you recommend to address the problem of "presenteeism" and the related public health challenge?
2. An [overwhelming majority of voters](#) support national legislation that would ensure workers have access to paid family leave. A Pew Research Center study¹ found that out of 41 countries, only the U.S. does not have a national paid parental leave policy. The

¹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/26/u-s-lacks-mandated-paid-parental-leave/>



National Partnership for Women and Families reports that only 14% of workers have access to paid family leave through their employers.² Many families, including new parents and those caring for ill family members, are put in dire circumstances because they do not have access to paid leave. Furthermore, the Family and Medical Leave Act currently only guarantees unpaid leave to 60% of workers. A growing number of localities and states are adopting paid leave policies including DC, California, New Jersey and Rhode Island. How do you propose to meet the needs of workers through expanded federal paid family leave policies? What additional policies would you support to help families balance work and family?

3. The September 2016 final rule from the Department of Labor ensured that over a million workers under federal contract will now have access to paid sick days. This measure is an important step forward for these workers and their families, as well as public health. How do you plan to ensure this rule is upheld and ensure that federal contractors can access a minimum number of paid sick days so that they do not have to go to work sick?

Minimum and Living Wage, and Access to Fair Wages

4. According to the [MIT Living Wage calculator](#), there are no states in which the minimum wage is sufficient to constitute a living wage. This means that millions of workers who work full-time do not earn enough to cover their necessities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics³, about half of all minimum wage workers are over age 25. Minimum wage workers seek to support themselves and their families. How do you plan to support struggling American families who are hindered by an insufficient minimum wage? What is your position on raising the federal minimum wage?
5. Wage theft violations have resulted in workers losing [at least 8.6 billion dollars per year](#). How do you intend to protect workers from such theft and make sure they receive the pay they work for and deserve?

Women's Economic Security

6. Women frequently face discrimination in hiring practices, as well as unequal pay. Women, on average, make 80 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts. The gap is even greater for women of color. What mechanisms do you think should be changed or created to address the gender wage gap?

² <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/issues/work-family/paid-leave.html>

³ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/minimum-wage/2015/home.htm>

Rights to Collective Bargaining and Fair Labor Practices

7. Unions have been served an indispensable role in helping to protect workers from unfair labor practices and working to ensure policies that benefit all workers—union members and nonmembers alike. What role do you believe unions serve in today's economy?
8. Many states have taken measures to reduce the ability for workers to organize for collective bargaining rights. This limits the power workers have to negotiate for pay, benefits, safety and other vital issues. What is your approach to the barriers to unionization that workers currently face?
9. Domestic workers—whether they are cleaning personnel, nannies, yard workers, or elder care workers—play a vital role in the American economy and workforce. Frequently they face labor abuse and do not receive the protections they deserve. What measures would you support to help protect these workers?

Employment Discrimination

10. Many states have no laws regarding employment discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people. 28 states allow employees to be hired or fired based on sexual orientation and gender identity. What responsibility does the federal government have to ensure that no workers is discriminated against based on their sexual orientation or gender identity? What steps would you take to protect these workers from discrimination?
11. The Department of Labor houses the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, which is responsible for enforcing labor practice regarding federal contractors. This includes enforcing Executive Order 11246, most recently updated by President Obama's 2014 Executive Order 13672. These executive orders protect numerous groups from discrimination in employment. How would you direct this office to enforce these executive orders? Do you support a religious exemption to this executive order, which would essentially allow for taxpayer-funded employment discrimination? If so, how do you intend to ensure robust First Amendment protections?
12. The labor participation rate for people with disabilities is 20%, compared to 68.4% for those without disabilities. People with disabilities have an unemployment rate of 10% compared to 4.2% for people without disabilities. What steps would you take to close this gap? How do you think the federal government can better protect people with disabilities from discrimination?