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## Laphonza Butler

**JOB QUALITY FELLOW, CLASS OF 2017-18, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM**

President, SEIU 2015, Los Angeles, CA

 @LaphonzaB

Laphonza Butler is the President of SEIU Local 2015 – a union uniting the voices of more than 325,000 nursing home and home-care workers throughout California. SEIU Local 2015 is the largest union in California and the largest long-term care local in the country, achieving historic victories – including the passage of the nation’s first \$15 statewide minimum wage to improve the lives of over 6 million Californians, for which Butler’s leadership was honored by President Obama.

Previously, Butler served for seven years as President of SEIU United Long Term Care Workers (ULTCW), and also as SEIU’s Property Services Division Director in which she was responsible for the strategic direction of the more than 250,000 janitors, security officers, window cleaners, and food service workers across the country. Butler also currently serves as an SEIU

International Vice President and President of the SEIU California State Council. Additionally, she Chairs the University of California African-American Advisory Council, serves as a Board Member for the National Children's Defense Fund and the Bay Area Economic Council Institute, is a fellow for the MIT Community Innovators Lab, and formerly was Director for the Board of Governors of the Los Angeles branch of the Federal Reserve System.

## WHAT DOES JOB QUALITY MEAN TO LAPHONZA?

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An Interview with Job Quality Fellow Laphonza Butler

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Laphonza Butler is a member of the [Job Quality Fellowship](#) Class of 2017-18. To learn more about the Job Quality Fellows, visit [as.pn/jobquality](https://aspeninstitute.org/jobquality).

The Job Quality Fellowship is part of the [Economic Opportunity Fellows Network](#), a network of leadership and fellowship programs run by the Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunities Program](#). Within this Network, EOP connects national and local leaders from across sectors — nonprofit, government, business, philanthropy, academia, and more — to advance policies and practices with the potential to help low- and moderate-income Americans thrive in today's economy. Learn more at [as.pn/eofn](https://aspeninstitute.org/eofn).

*Bio updated September 2017.*

**AUTHORED BY LAPHONZA**



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Laphonza Butler discusses the meaning of job...

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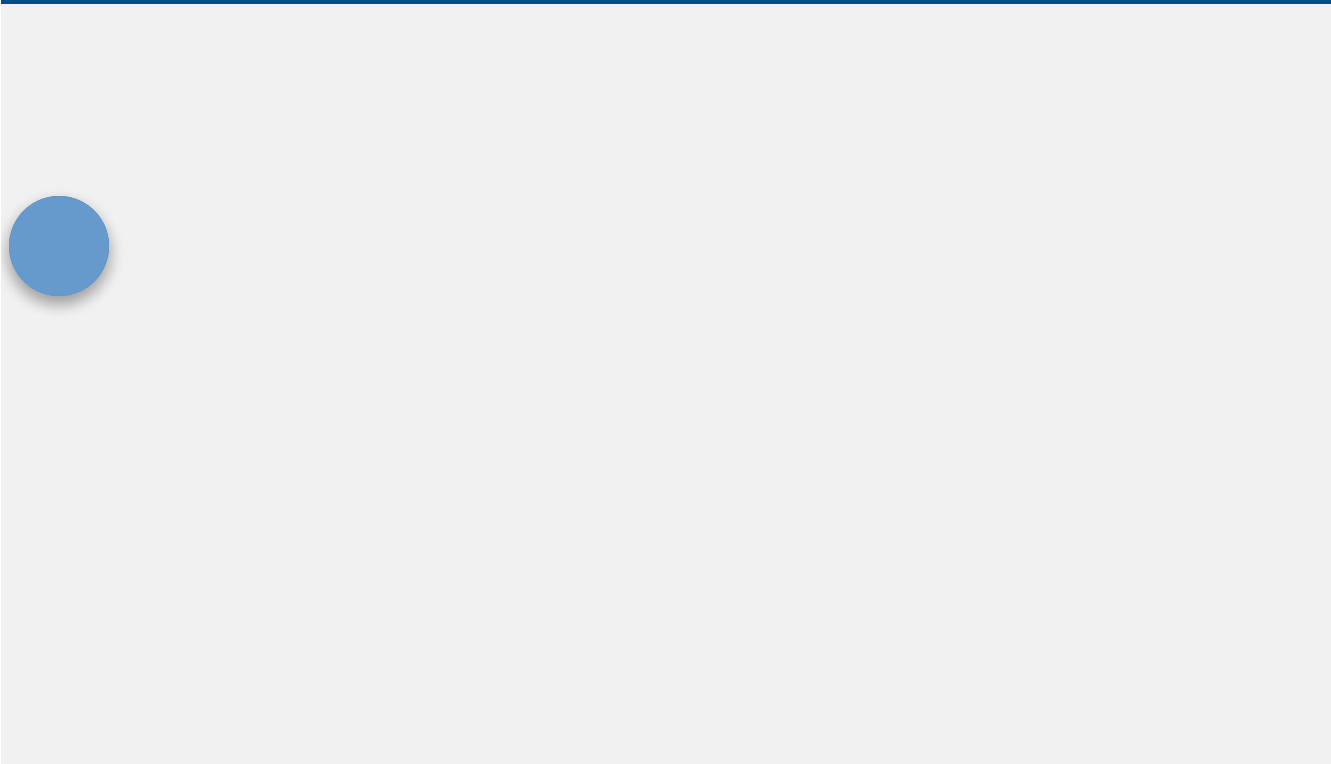


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## How to improve job quality and reduce costs in home care

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Laphonza Butler, a member of the Aspen Institute [Job Quality Fellowship](#), discusses her role as president of SEIU Local 2015, representing 180,000 in-home caregivers and nursing home workers throughout California. The Job Quality Fellowship, led by the [Economic Opportunities Program](#), brings together innovators from differing lines of work who are engaged in work that expands the availability of better quality jobs in our economy. Learn more at [as.pn/jobquality](https://as.pn/jobquality).

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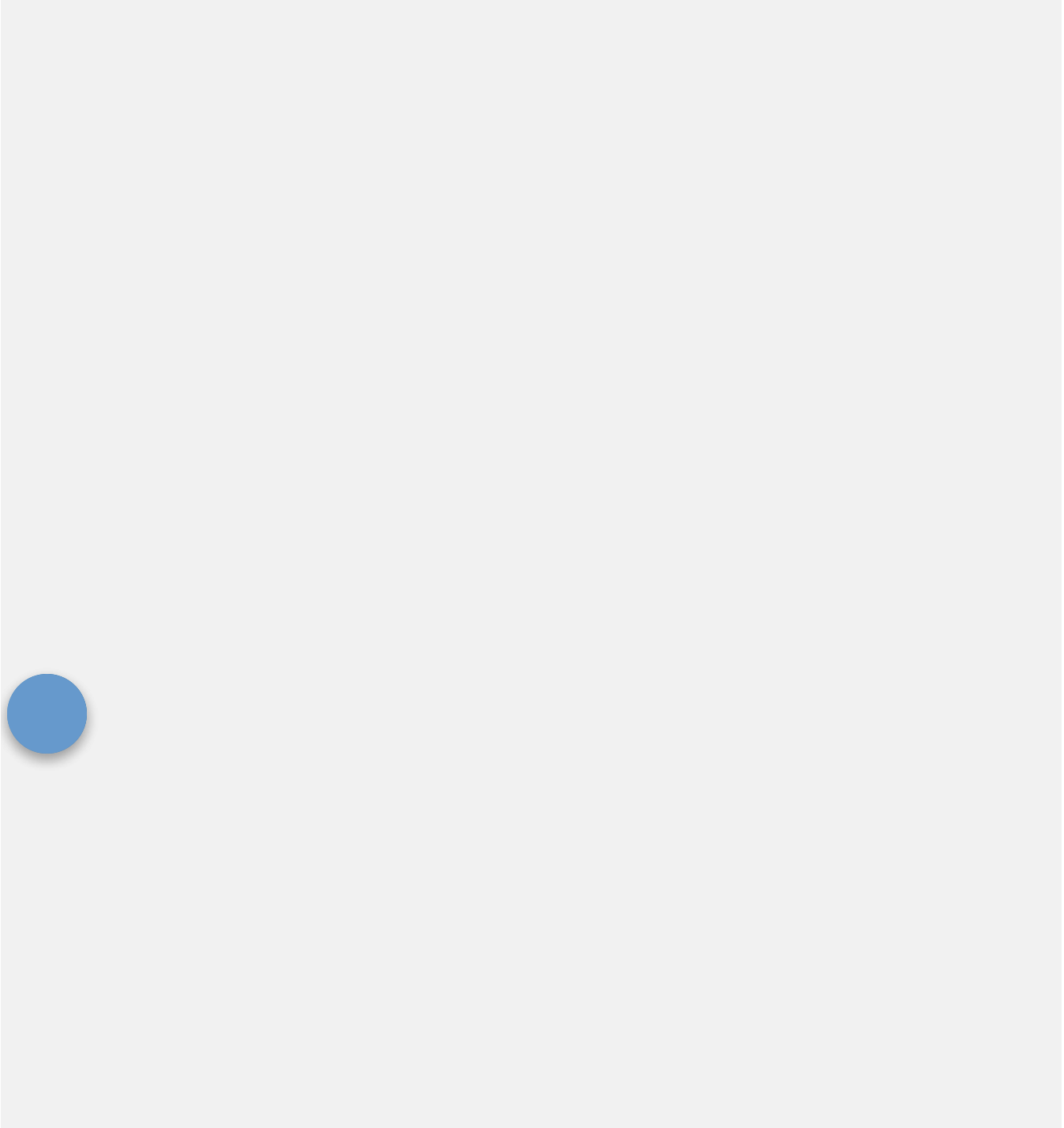
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## Defining job quality

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Laphonza Butler, a member of the Aspen Institute [Job Quality Fellowship](#), discusses the meaning of job quality. The Job Quality Fellowship, led by the [Economic Opportunities Program](#), brings together innovators from differing lines of work who are engaged in work that expands the availability of better quality jobs in our economy. Learn more at [as.pn/jobquality](https://as.pn/jobquality).

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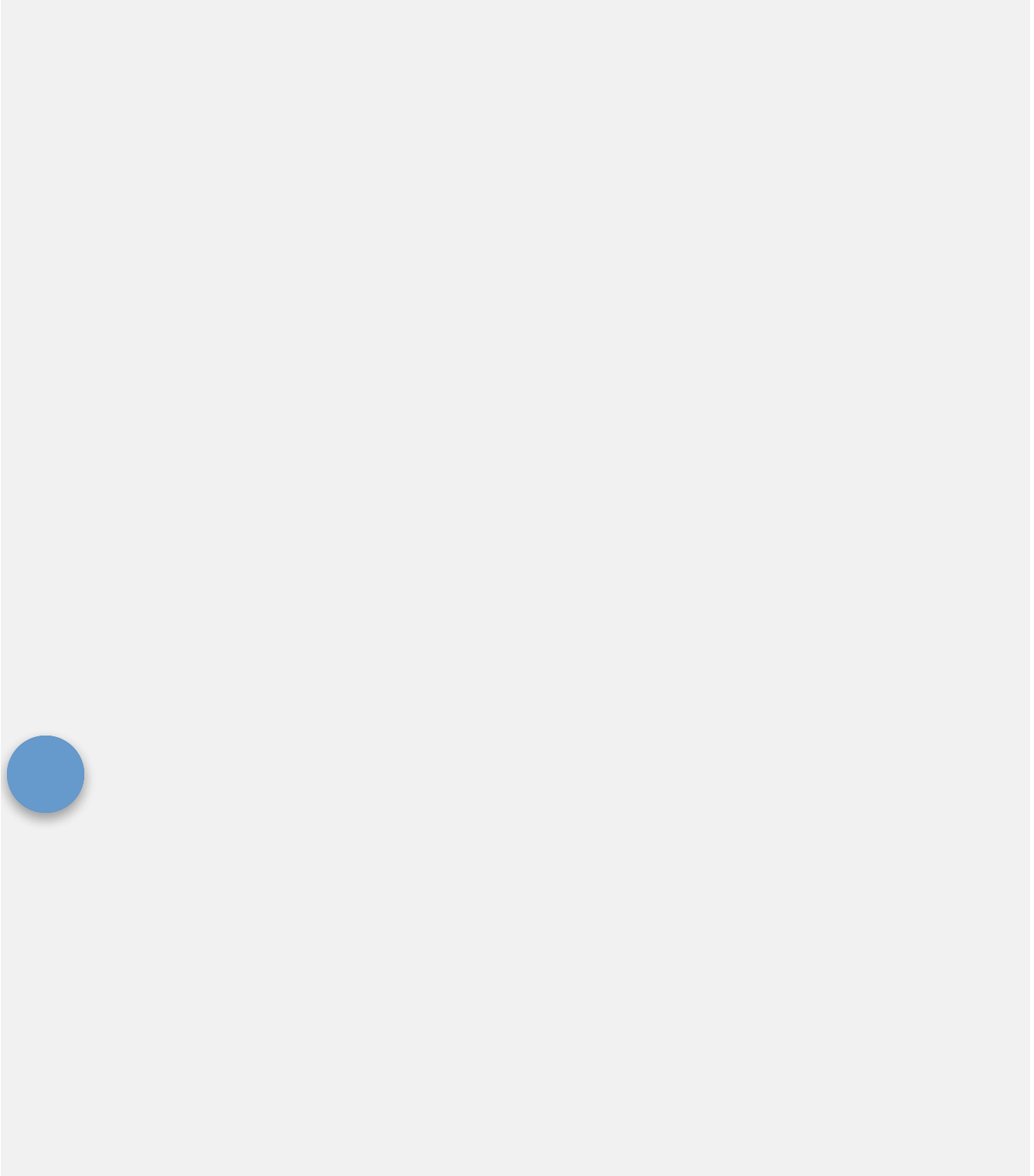
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respect.” #AspenJobQuality Fellow @LaphonzaB @SEIU2015



**EMPLOYMENT AND JOBS****An Interview with Job Quality Fellow Laphonza Butler**

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Job Quality Fellow, Class of 2017-18

*President, SEIU Local 2015*

What does job quality mean to you, and why is it important?

We're at a moment when it's critical to develop a common vision of job quality for our country. This vision is essential to support the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow.

Job quality speaks to how we consider the worker as a whole person – ensuring that workers have dignity and respect in the workplace, that they have a voice on the job, and that their opinions and expertise are valued. A quality job allows workers to provide for their families, save for their retirement in comfort, and have confidence in the contributions they have made to their community.

Job quality matters now more than ever. Our largest generation is aging and is continuing to live and work longer than in previous generations. We also have a new cohort of younger people entering the workforce who are excited to contribute to their workplaces and communities. The convergence of these trends requires us to have a long-term vision that guides strategies for shared prosperity across our nation's workforce.


Describe your organization's work and how it's connected to job quality.

For nine years, I have served as president of Service Employees International Union Local 2015 (SEIU Local 2015) in California, representing more than 350,000 home care, skilled nursing facility, and assisted living center workers. SEIU Local 2015 is the largest long-term care union in California and the second largest SEIU Local nationwide.

With 46 million Americans older than 65, and an average of 10,000 baby boomers hitting that milestone every day, the demand for long-term care workers is growing quickly. At the same time, long-term care workers face numerous challenges at work. Our caregiving workforce is underpaid, lacks access to workplace benefits, and has few opportunities to improve skills through training. The National Employment Law Project reports, for instance, that nearly one in five home care workers are paid less than the minimum wage and that 80 percent work unpaid overtime. Furthermore, home care workers rarely have the potential to come together to improve their working conditions because they often work in isolation, in private homes, and on temporary assignments.







At SEIU Local 2015, we're thinking about the workers who are necessary to support our large aging generation and the policies and practices that need to be in place to ensure that these workers are afforded the dignity, respect, and economic security that this important work should provide. Our members have the same dreams, hopes, and optimism for a prosperous future that every worker shares. What sets them apart is that their profession is to care for someone every single day—and we, in turn, do our part to ensure their work is valued and respected in the workplace.

SEIU Local 2015 is guided by a mission and vision centered on improving the lives of long-term care workers. As a union, our first and primary responsibility to our members is collective bargaining, and we have seen tangible outcomes from these efforts. We have helped our workers secure increases in wages with extended overtime in facilities across the state. We have also organized and fought for changes to local and state policies that affect our members and residents across California. For example, we helped lead the Fight for \$15, which benefited more than 5.6 million workers in California and improved the minimum wage and living standards not just for our members, but for all working families in California. We have also raised statewide standards for patient care by successfully fighting to increase the required nursing hours per patient in a skilled nursing facility, ensuring that our consumers and patients receive the quality care and attention they deserve.

**“We’re at a moment when it’s critical to develop a common vision of job quality for our country. This vision is essential to support the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow.”**


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One of our strategies is to expand job training and career development opportunities for home care workers, which improves job quality for workers and translates to higher quality care for patients. We believe that highly trained home care workers will help to reduce long-term health care costs and improve the overall quality of care for patients. Through a grant from the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Innovation, we are working to study the effects of “integrated care teams,” in which home health care workers are embedded into patients’ long-term care teams along with doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals.

Just from our initial data, we’ve seen evidence that our hypothesis is correct: Training a home care worker and integrating him or her into patients’ care teams helps to minimize the number of emergency room visits and the length of hospital stays. It also creates a frontline “first responder” who can make sure patients are taking

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medication, complying with nutrition suggestions from their physicians, and getting the exercise they need to stay healthy.



We've seen that, beyond the impact integrated care teams have on the health care system, there is also an impact on the confidence of the home care worker. With the increased training home care workers receive, they feel entirely more equipped to be advocates on behalf of their patients. They also feel more confident that their work matters and has value, and they believe that training should be an important part of the home care workforce of the future.

As we think about the future of work and job quality, we aim to champion both the professional and personal development of our members and improve their lives and communities through our work. Beyond the economic value of SEIU Local 2015 to our members, our union provides an opportunity for fellowship among long-term care workers. Our members work both in skilled nursing facilities and individually in home environments with long hours, tough work, and compassion for their patients. Our union provides them an opportunity to connect with and learn from their colleagues, whom they may not see regularly. I've been told countless stories of friendships that have emerged and bonds that have grown from our members supporting each other in their personal lives.

**In the next few years, what are SEIU Local 2015's goals as they relate to improving job quality?**

Our goals over the next few years involve creating more job stability for California's existing long-term care workers, developing a clear career path with educational and advancement opportunities, and establishing a delivery system model with fully integrated care teams that include home care workers and other health care professionals.

In order to achieve more job stability, we are focusing not just on pay, but also on other factors that affect people's ability to work with confidence. For instance, one of our priorities is to create new pathways to retirement by advocating for retirement savings programs for our historically excluded workers in the long-term care sector. We continue to advocate for effective opportunities for our members to grow wealth and secure their futures. We are also prioritizing how technological advancement and disruption may affect job quality and job accessibility for long-term care workers. We see this moment of technological change as an

opportunity to create new digital products that will allow caregivers to perform their work more effectively and productively.

Additionally, with the rise of managed care, care coordination, and care integration, the US health care delivery system has the potential to continue to undergo considerable change and create opportunity for job quality improvement for long-term care workers. Over the next few years, we will continue to advocate for policies to advance care integration teams that include home care workers. This means we will consider how we develop workers so that they get the skills they need and the opportunities for advancement they deserve. For this reason, a major advocacy priority is to advance state and national training standards in the sector of non-medical home care, create apprenticeship programs for home care workers, and develop career ladders where increases in skills and responsibilities are tied to improved compensation and opportunities for career advancement.

[Describe the experience and perspective you bring to the Job Quality Fellowship.](#)

In addition to my role as president of SEIU Local 2015, I recently completed my four-year tenure as president of SEIU California State Council. In that role, I focused my efforts on a broad set of goals related to job quality across industries, including raising the state minimum wage, winning paid time off, creating innovative retirement solutions, enhancing workplace protections related to immigration, and advocating for regional housing and transportation solutions that make job choices easier.

In both of my roles, I have seen firsthand how partnerships across labor, business, government, and community are key to advancing job quality at scale. As a fellow, I offer insights on my experiences building partnerships across sectors, including my perspective on how to break down and break through the common roadblocks that get in the way of effective partnerships. In the Fight for \$15 campaign, we built a coalition of small businesses, nonprofits, and community-based organizations, along with city, county, and state governments, to develop solutions to raise the floor on wages and other job protections, while ensuring that our economies could continue to thrive. We have succeeded in creating and advocating for effective policies because we have worked with a broad group of stakeholders. I've learned that, while we're incredibly effective as a union, we're certainly stronger together with allies. SEIU Local 2015 has taken this to heart and formally adopted the motto, Together We Rise, because we believe in the collective power of our members and our community.

[What do you hope to learn and achieve through the Job Quality Fellowship?](#)

The organized labor community, along with businesses, government, nonprofits, philanthropists, and investors have big questions ahead of us. First and foremost, what kind of society do we want to build? And, central to that question, what does work mean, and how is it valued? Being a part of this fellowship connects me to people with whom I otherwise would not have an opportunity to talk about big questions. I would like to learn from other fellows: How do they experience the labor movement in their sectors or communities? What is the role of government in their sectors or communities? What should labor unions be doing differently to further improve job quality? How do business leaders consider job quality as a core part of their operational model?

Now is the time for these conversations to happen, and now is the time for us to envision the future that we want. I'm looking forward to building those relationships, having some difficult conversations, and asking ourselves questions that may not be popular to ask at home. Over the next year I think we will not only have a chance to ask the questions, but will also hopefully find the time to start to put together some solutions and create the pathway to the kind of society that our workers, families, and communities deserve.

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Announcing the Job Quality Fellowship Class of 2017-18

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Learn how EOP is helping low- and moderate-income Americans connect to and thrive in a changing economy. Sign up to receive news about the Job Quality Fellows and other announcements via email.



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## Better Jobs, Better Country

[ Laphonza Butler ]

JUNE 12, 2018 • MAUREEN CONWAY & MARK G. POPOVICH

A decade has passed since the country's deepest economic slide since the Great Depression. While recovery arrived for some soon after the 2008 crisis, those at the bottom 60 percent of the income distribution continue to see eroding wages, fraying benefits, and evaporating job security. Too few jobs today are a real route to an economically stable life.

The Institute's [Economic Opportunities Program](#) has long focused on addressing these issues. In July 2017, the program extended the Institute's leadership and dialogue model to launch the Job Quality Fellowship, with support from the Prudential and Ford Foundations. From 177 applicants, the program selected 16 local leaders who are actively improving job quality for the people and communities they serve.

Fellows come from all regions and from many disciplines: economic development, workforce development, community- and business-development lending, employers, unions, worker advocacy, higher education. They span the private, nonprofit, and public sectors. In gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic class, fellows are as diverse as the country. The bright thread linking them is their success in leading strategies that create higher-quality jobs—often in ways that also improve business performance and the ability to compete and survive in challenging marketplaces. Most of us spend one-third or more of our lives at work. Certainly, sufficient and stable wages to cover living expenses and build some assets, safe working conditions free from harassment or discrimination, a manageable schedule, and benefits are core to defining job quality. So too are meaningful work, having a voice in the workplace, and being valued and respected. The Economic Opportunities Program

promotes better job quality in order to progress toward a more equitable future as businesses, workers, investors, government, and others come together to improve the workplace and create more good jobs. Through the program's support of the Job Quality fellows, it has become clear that these local leaders can shape the future of work.

During their yearlong fellowship, which includes three meetings and work-between sessions, fellows exchange ideas and lessons learned. Poor job quality is not inevitable. And, whatever employers may assume, poor job quality is not a sure path to financial gain. As these fellows and their peers demonstrate, action by government, businesses, communities, and consumers should not be hampered by the misperception that wages, benefits, and working conditions can be changed only through a trade-off that harms businesses. Three fellows—a corporate retailer, a home-care union leader, and a state government workforce- and business-development official—describe the impact of their fellowship experience.

**J.D. LaROCK**

**President and CEO, Commonwealth Corporation**

My career has long focused on education and training issues in Massachusetts and beyond. I've spearheaded workforce development and education policy and legislation for Senator Ted Kennedy, helped Governor Deval Patrick create more innovative K-12 schools, and assisted the president of Northeastern University on his new book about the future of work. In 2017, I was appointed to lead the Commonwealth Corporation, a public-private authority working with Governor Charlie Baker's administration to grapple with the challenges businesses and workers face, including job quality. We have an annual budget of \$55 million and award \$20 incumbent workers to advance in their careers and to create new jobs. We particularly focus on people facing extended unemployment and poverty. A grant to the city of Brockton, for example, is engaging people from the substance-abuse community to become certified recovery coaches through training, employer-based internships, and mentoring. The program helps both job seekers and their employers extend services in an area with high rates of addiction.

For me, the fellowship is a unique forum to learn from leaders grappling with similar opportunities, to brainstorm, and to build new initiatives for Massachusetts. A million workers in my state hold low-wage jobs. We can and should extend ladders of opportunity to them through education and building skills as well as partnering with employers to boost workers' earnings, benefits, retention, and economic stability.

Based on fellows' ideas, the Commonwealth Corporation is doing more with our fund to improve job quality. Thanks to my peer fellow Anjali Sakaria, who spearheads it, we have a new partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, which brings us research and a meeting place. MIT Professor Zeynep Ton identified retail industries that improved business processes, leading to cost savings that were invested back into the workers; we're interested in expanding these approaches into more businesses. Through our partnership with the Boston Fed, we can share practices and data from firms in industries like retail and food service or hospitality with other employers. And we'll also create partnerships between companies and organizations that deliver training and education to advance job quality with the grants we administer.

## **LARA SHOCK**

**Senior Director, Associate Experience, Walmart, Inc.**

When I started as a Walmart cashier a dozen years ago, I imagined it would be pit stop on the way to something better. I didn't think I'd have a career here. Where I thought I'd find a commitment to the status quo, I found a dedication to innovation. I found great people doing really good work. The company, the world's largest retailer, offered great opportunities for my career over the decades. Today, I have the privilege of leading the team that is developing and deploying flexible scheduling options for our front-line hourly associates. This is part of Walmart's \$2.7 billion commitment to enhancing the associate experience through increased education, wages, and training.

It is complicated but essential to offer associates options that allow them to have fulfilling career experiences. For example, fulltime workers prefer consistent scheduling and a predictable paycheck; students at a local

college might want to pick up hours that fit their changing class schedules through their mobile devices; associates with school-age children want flexible schedules based on their families' changing needs. Businesses can do scheduling in a way that benefits workers and improves the customer experience as well as the company itself. So far, we've implemented the Core Hours program—consistent schedules—in our neighborhood markets. The technology has also spread to supercenters and other facilities.

In 2018, the company raised starting wages to \$11 an hour, provided \$1,000 bonuses, and expanded paid paternal and maternity leave for hourly associates. In the fellowship, I offer the employer perspective—noting the rapid pace in retail and the imperative to move from talking about options to acting. Most of my peers in the fellowship offer ideas for understanding and meeting the expectations of an incredibly diverse workforce. That is directly applicable to Walmart, and I'm bringing those ideas back for consideration to the central headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas.

### **LAPHONZA BUTLER**

#### **President, SEIU Local 2015**

I've been president of the SEIU local in California for eight years. We're working on behalf of 350,000 workers who are employed in home care, skilled nursing facilities, and assisted-living centers. This group has faced discrimination and disadvantage. As work conditions, hours, and job-safety laws were passed to protect American workers, home-care jobs were excluded, because they were family or home-based—and most of the work was done by women and minorities.

Our goal is to be a 21st-century worker organization that builds partnerships and embraces education and innovation so that these workers have quality jobs with livable wages, retirement security, respect, and the right to a union. That will also ensure access to quality care for seniors and others. To my fellowship peers, I bring the worker perspective and lessons hard won through the successful campaign for a \$15 minimum wage. Home-care health workers are excluded from the federal minimum wage and other worker protections. Because the likelihood for



improvements in federal law is dim, we're pushing for state and local changes. Here's one example of a specific idea from the fellowship that we're running with at SEIU Local 2015: during our first fellowship session, Sean Daniel Murphy, the director of the ICA Fund Good Jobs, and others talked about the importance of wages from jobs. They also said that getting beyond poverty and into a secure quality of life depends on community development and asset building.

At our union, we latched on to the idea of starting a new business to deliver home-based health care, maybe as a workers' cooperative. There aren't big barriers like bonding requirements, an expensive building, or extensive regulations to begin offering these services to the elderly and disabled. Good caregivers are the key. And we have those great workers. If we start a new service, we'd of course offer good jobs. But can we also influence community development and build workers' assets? We contacted an investor and philanthropist to gauge their interest. So far, the discussions are encouraging. And that's just one example!

