

Basic Q and A: Sonoma County Living Wage Campaign

A coalition of labor, faith, environmental, and community organizations proposed a living wage ordinance to the County of Sonoma in the fall of 2014. The coalition's anchor organizations include: North Bay Jobs with Justice, North Bay Labor Council, North Bay Organizing Project, Sonoma County Conservation Action, Sonoma County Democratic Party, and the Sierra Club.

What is the problem?

1) 30 percent of the county population are the working poor and reside in families that receive less than \$47,100 a year (with at least one family member working). **Between 2010-2020 more than 50% of the jobs created in the county will pay less than \$20 an hour and 40 percent will pay less than \$15 an hour.**

What is a living wage? Does everyone deserve a living wage?

1) According to the California Budget Project (CBP), in 2013 two parents working full time to support two children **must earn \$20.51 an hour each** to pay for the basics including food, housing, health care, child care, and transportation and not rely on any government subsidies or programs.

2) **The California minimum wage of \$9 an hour is not a living wage.** If adjusted annually for inflation since the late 1960s the California minimum wage would now be \$12.04 today according to the CBP! Every worker deserves a living wage; it is a moral imperative to pay a living wage;

What is a Living Wage law?

1) The proposed county legislation will mandate \$15 an hour wage for all workers employed by the county, by firms and organizations contracting with the county, and by private companies receiving public subsidies or leasing property from the county. A for profit employer must have more than six employees and a contract of more than \$20,000 annually to be covered by the legislation.

What workers will the proposed law impact?

1) **Employees for the county** who will be covered include park aides, office and voter registration clerks, animal care and event services assistants and county fair temporary workers.

2) **Employees for county contractors** that will be covered include janitors, paratransit drivers, security guards, mental health, waste management/recycling,

pest control, and building maintenance workers. The legislation will also cover more than 4000 In Home Support Service workers who earn \$11.65 an hour.

3) The law will also mandate that covered employers **provide 12 paid sick days and 10 unpaid personal leave for each worker.**

4) **It is likely that about 5500 low-wage workers** for the county and county contractors will be covered.

5) Studies of cities such as Boston and Los Angeles which implemented living wage laws indicate that covered workers are adults who are a primarily contributor to family incomes. In Boston the median annual income for covered workers was \$23, 324 in 2002. In Los Angeles, 58 percent of the impacted workers were 35 or older, 86 percent worked full time, and half were Latino, 29 percent African-American, and 12 percent Asian-American.

How will workers benefit?

1) All covered workers will receive \$15 an hour wages. The law will also mandate that covered employers **provide 12 paid sick days and 10 unpaid personal leave for each worker.**

2) **Living wage legislation has yielded significant wage gains for low wagers.** A study by the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education found that 10,000 employees of contractors, lessees, and concessionaires at the San Francisco International Airport received average annual pay increases of 22 percent after the approval of the living wage law for the airport in 2000.

How will the community benefit?

1) **The public sector should be a model employer and taxpayer monies should not fund poverty wage jobs;**

2) **A small raise for the bottom is a stimulus for the local economy,** as low-wage workers will use increased earnings to purchase basic necessities from local business;

3) **Paying a living wage means less reliance by the working families on public subsidies** (i.e. Food Stamps, Medi-Cal/Medicaid);

4) **Living wages are necessary to close the jobs-housing mismatch** and will enable workers to live nearby their workplace.

How much will the ordinance cost the county?

1) Based upon a 2003 study of 20 cities and counties that implemented living wage ordinances by New York University Brennan Center found that contractors passed on to the cities about half their increased costs. **On average, the total cost to the cities and counties studied was less than 1 percent of the annual operating budget.**

According to a fiscal impact report by University of Massachusetts economist Dr. Jeannette Wicks-Lim, the total cost to implement the proposed living wage law will be 0.9 percent of the overall annual county budget of \$1.4 billion in 2014-2015.

2) UCB Center for Labor Research and Education completed fiscal impact studies for the Cities of Sebastopol (2003), Sonoma (2004), and Petaluma (2006). The predicted costs to each city ranged from .2 percent (Sonoma), .5 percent (Sebastopol) to 1 percent (Petaluma) of the total annual operating budget for the city.

What is the Living Wage movement?

Our campaign is part of a nationwide campaign to raise the wage floor for all workers. This includes:

1) **Local Living Wage Ordinances:** 140 cities and counties have implemented living wage laws, among them the California counties of Sacramento, Marin, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Ventura, and Los Angeles. In Sonoma County, the cities of Sebastopol (2003), Sonoma (2004), and Petaluma (2006) approved living wage ordinances. The Petaluma living wage rate in 2014-2015 is \$13.66 an hour with benefits and \$15.32 without.

2) **City-Wide Minimum Wage:** Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Los Angeles, and San Diego and numerous other small cities in California have implemented \$13-\$15 an hour citywide minimum wage laws through ballot initiative or a city council vote.

3) **Raise the State Minimum Wage:** As of 2015, 22 states and the District of Columbia with more than half the population have approved minimum wage rates above the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour; four Republican-dominated states including Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota minimum wage by ballot initiative last fall.

State Senator Mark Leno has introduced a bill in the California legislature that will raise the state minimum wage to \$13 an hour by 2017 and provide an annual cost of living adjustment (COLA).

4) **Win back the House of Representatives** and raise the federal minimum to \$12 an hour with a COLA. Republicans are blocking a federal minimum wage increase—to \$12 an hour by 2020—introduced by Senator Patty Murray (D-

Washington).

Conclusion: What can you do?

Please 1) sign our petition, 2) contribute to our campaign, 3) host a house meeting, 4) attend an action or town hall meeting, and 5) lobby your supervisor by email, phone, or mail.

"No business which depends for existence on paying less than living wages to its workers has any right to continue in this country. By living wages, I mean more than a bare subsistence level -- I mean the wages of decent living" (Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933).

Dr. Martin Luther King stated in 1966: "a living wage should be the right of all Americans."

Sonoma County Coalition Living Wage Coalition includes (partial listing):

North Bay Jobs with Justice	Graton Day Labor Center
North Bay Organizing Committee	COMITE Vida
SEIU Local 1021	Congregation Shomrei Torah
Sierra Club	Christ Church United Methodist
Sonoma County Conservation Action	Unitarian Universalists Santa Rosa
North Bay Labor Council	Redwood Forest Friends Meeting
Sonoma County Democratic Party	Peace and Justice Center

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