

June 28, 2015

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

From: Marty Bennett, Co-Chair, North Bay Jobs with Justice

I am writing on behalf of the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County, a coalition of labor, faith, environmental and community-based organizations that unveiled a proposed living wage law for the County of Sonoma in September 2014. We are extremely dismayed that the Board of Supervisors did not direct staff to work with our coalition to revise our proposed ordinance, which is based on living wage laws approved by the cities of Sebastopol, Sonoma, and Petaluma, as well as the best ordinances implemented elsewhere in the Bay Area and the nation.

We support the recommendations of several Supervisors to raise the wage rate to \$15 an hour, to include coverage of large nonprofits contracting with the county, and to include a phase-in of the hourly wage rate. However, we cannot support the ordinance drafted by county staff and Blue Sky consultants, which is currently under consideration by your Board, for the following reasons:

- The proposed ordinance is not consistent with the County of Sonoma report, “A Portrait of Sonoma,” which recommends that the County “ensure that all jobs, including those that do not require a college degree, pay wages that afford workers the dignity of self-sufficiency and the peace of mind of economic security.” The report explicitly calls for building upon other living wage ordinances implemented in the County to “raise the wage floor further.” The proposed ordinance exempts far more workers from the \$15-an-hour wage than it covers. In-Home Supportive Service workers (IHSS), mental health workers, waste management employees, county-fair temporary workers, and those employed by firms leasing property or receiving county concessions or franchises are excluded in this proposal.
- The proposed ordinance perpetuates paying poverty wages to many employees of firms with economic ties to the county and does not reflect the values of economic and social justice that are the foundation of our campaign.
- The proposed ordinance ignores all of the parts of our coalition’s draft ordinance designed to improve job quality, including a minimum of 12 days of paid sick leave; opportunities for increased hours for part-time workers; a responsible-bidder provision ensuring compliance by contractors with labor, health-and-safety, and environmental laws; and a labor peace provision protecting the right of workers employed by contractors to organize a union. Numerous Living Wage Ordinances implemented by cities, counties, and airports in the Bay Area and California include these provisions. There is no cost to the jurisdictions for most of these good jobs provisions.
- The proposed ordinance fails to index the wage rate to the Consumer Price Index, leading to constant erosion of the buying power of low-wage workers.
- The proposed ordinance undermines the right of private action by omitting attorney-fee recovery, and the County Administrator is given unprecedented authority to recommend hardship waivers.

We strongly believe that, without major changes that address our concerns, the ordinance currently under consideration is a weak and ineffective law that fails to address the main cause for growing inequality in the county: between 2010 and 2020, fifty percent of the new jobs created will pay less than a livable wage of \$20 dollars an hour.

A comprehensive and effective ordinance should include mental health workers, employees of large firms leasing property and of large firms with concessions and franchises, and IHSS workers. Both the County of

Marin Living Wage Ordinance implemented in 2002, and the San Francisco Countywide Minimum Wage Ordinance overwhelmingly approved by the voters in 2014, cover IHSS workers. Public support for our campaign indicates that Sonoma residents want the board to provide a clear path for IHSS workers to receive a \$15-an-hour wage.

All of the anchor organizations for the coalition including North Bay Jobs with Justice, North Bay Organizing Project, North Bay Labor Council, Sonoma County Conservation Action, the Sierra Club, Sonoma County Democratic Party, and representatives of the faith community have reviewed and approved this letter.

Coalition representatives are available to discuss our concerns with supervisors in more detail prior to August 11th when the second reading of the Living Wage Ordinance is on the board agenda.