

Arkansas Takes First Step to a Higher Minimum Wage

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Coalition Begins Gathering Signatures to Place Amendment on November Ballot

Little Rock, AR — Today, Arkansas took a first step toward giving an urgently needed boost to both working families and the state's economy, when the attorney general certified a proposed constitutional amendment to raise the state's minimum wage. A coalition of Arkansas religious leaders and community groups will now begin circulating petitions to give Arkansas voters the opportunity to vote on the amendment this fall.

Arkansas's current minimum wage is just \$5.15 an hour – the same as the federal rate, which has not been increased since 1997. At \$5.15, the minimum wage is nearly 40% less than what it worth in real terms in 1968. With a full-time minimum wage worker today earning just \$10,700 a year, many low-income families are barely getting by, struggling to put food on the table and a roof over their heads.

“This campaign will make Arkansas the first state in the Delta – one of the poorest regions in the country – to act to ensure a decent minimum wage,” said Maxine Nelson, co-chair of the Arkansas Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and chair of Jefferson County ACORN. “The minimum wage amendment will directly increase the income of over 56,000 Arkansas families, and improve the economy as well, since working families will have more money to spend in their local communities.”

The campaign to raise Arkansas’s minimum wage is being led by a coalition that includes the state’s chapter of ACORN, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, community groups and the faith community including leaders from the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Church Disciples of Christ, the Missionary Baptist Church, and the Jewish community.

“Working families in Arkansas have watched the minimum wage lag behind the cost of living for almost ten years,” said Raj Nayak of the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School. “Arkansas voters will finally have the chance to say that \$5.15 is not enough.” The Brennan Center is advising the coalition in drafting the minimum wage ballot initiative and serves as legal counsel to the campaign.

As Congress has refused to address the falling minimum wage, activists in communities across the country have sought to respond by raising the minimum wage at the state and local levels. Currently sixteen states and three cities have minimum wages higher than the federal level. This fall, voters in five other states will also consider ballot initiatives to raise their state minimum wages and permanently index them for inflation -- Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, Montana, and Ohio. The Brennan Center serves as counsel to this national movement and is

advising these campaigns as well.

The proposed Arkansas amendment would raise the state's minimum wage to \$6.15 per hour, with automatic increases in future years for inflation. The coalition must gather 80,570 valid signatures by the first week of July in order to place the amendment on the ballot.

To speak with families who would be affected by the Arkansas minimum wage increase and activists gathering signatures, contact ACORN's Neil Sealy at 501-376-7151.

For more information on the minimum wage ballot initiative and the national movement to raise the minimum wage, contact the Brennan Center's Raj Nayak at 212-992-8639, cell 312-399-9904.

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School provides technical and legal assistance to community coalitions and lawmakers promoting policy initiatives to help working families. ACORN is the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 150,000 member families organized into 700 neighborhood chapters in 51 cities across the country.