

Grassroots Push for \$8.50 City-Wide Wage Ordinance in San Francisco Starts Out Strong

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National Trend Toward Broader Living Wage Laws Gaining Momentum

Just two weeks after a community coalition in San Francisco kicked off a signature-gathering drive, nearly 21,000 registered voters have endorsed a proposal to enact a city-wide minimum wage ordinance. The signatures filed today with the city Department of Elections are more than double the 10,000 needed to qualify the proposed ordinance as a ballot initiative.

If approved by voters this November, San Francisco will join Santa Fe and Washington, D.C. as the nation's third city with a wage ordinance applying to all businesses in the city. Also known as a city-wide living wage, such broad local wage ordinances are an important new policy trend as cities search for ways to help more low-income residents make

ends meet.

“The Bay Area has one of the highest costs of living in the nation. Low-income families just can’t meet basic needs on California’s \$6.75 minimum wage,” says Edwin Lopez, a resident of the Excelsior community of San Francisco and a member of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), one of the campaign’s sponsors. “It’s been exciting to see the outpouring of support from across the city for a real minimum wage.”

The signature drive was led by community groups, unions, and anti-poverty advocates coordinated by ACORN. The ordinance was drafted by the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, which specializes in helping federal, state and local lawmakers develop and defend reform legislation. In February, the Center helped Santa Fe lawmakers enact their similar city-wide wage ordinance.

“A city minimum wage is a way for those of us in the business community to do our part to help working families make ends meet,” says Barry Hermanson, a local business owner and leading supporter of the minimum wage campaign. “This is particularly important right now as the city and state face budget deficits forcing them to cut programs for low-income people.”

Like more than 100 other communities across the country, San Francisco in 2000 enacted a living wage ordinance establishing a higher minimum wage for businesses receiving city service contracts or benefiting from the use of city property. The new proposal would extend that ordinance to help more low-income families. An economic analysis prepared for the city by the University of California at Berkeley found a city minimum wage would raise pay for 50,000 low-income workers with only moderate costs for most businesses affected.

“What we’re seeing is the next wave of the living wage movement as

more cities extend their wage ordinances to cover private sector businesses,” says Brennan Center associate counsel Paul Sonn. “It’s an attractive option because these broader wage laws offer a way to help more struggling families but don’t involve new costs for cash-strapped city budgets.”

The Brennan Center provides legal and technical assistance to living wage campaigns, and other state and local policy reform initiatives, in communities across the nation. For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Amanda Cooper at the Brennan Center in New York at 212.998.6736 or John Eller at ACORN in San Francisco at 415.725.9869. Information is also available online within our [living wage section](#).