

Broad Coalition Files Legal Brief Asking Court to Uphold Santa Fe Living Wage Ordinance

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Santa Fe, New Mexico - A broad coalition of twelve civic groups today filed a [friend-of-the-court brief](#) in state court in Santa Fe urging Judge Daniel Sanchez to reject a legal challenge to Santa Fe's living wage ordinance. The ordinance, which will ensure a minimum wage of \$8.50 an hour for employees at businesses in the city with 25 or more workers when it takes effect in January 2004, was challenged in a lawsuit filed in March by business groups with the support of the national restaurant industry. The *amicus* brief urges the court to grant the motion filed by the City of Santa Fe in July, which seeks a summary judgment ruling that would dismiss the lawsuit.

“With Santa Fe's high cost of living and scarce affordable housing, low-income workers just can't support their families on the \$5.15

minimum wage,” explains Gene Valdes of the Santa Fe Partnership for Social Justice. “The twelve groups filing the brief represent the broad community consensus that Santa Fe needs the living wage ordinance.”

The diverse array of community, religious, civic, labor, immigrants’ rights, civil rights and advocacy organizations filing the brief include:

- The Hispanic Roundtable of New Mexico, the Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund, and Somos Un Pueblo Unido, a local immigrants’ rights group
- The Santa Fe Partnership for Social Justice, a collaboration of local Catholic Churches and other faith-based agencies
- The New Mexico Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, and the National Education Association-New Mexico The Democratic Party of Santa Fe County and the Green Party of Santa Fe County
- The Hunger-Poverty Network of Northern New Mexico, the New Mexico Human Needs Coordinating Council, the New Mexico Public Health Association, and the Coalition for Equality in New Mexico, a gay and lesbian civil rights organization

The twelve groups submitting the brief are representative of the more than 1,500 local residents and major civic groups in Santa Fe and across New Mexico that came together to support the Santa Fe City Council’s landmark seven-to-one vote to adopt the living wage ordinance in February.

“The decision to adopt the living wage law was made after more than a year of extensive research, hearings, and community consultation,” explains Todd Wertheim, the attorney representing the twelve groups. “The city’s research showed that a higher minimum wage is crucial for helping low-income Santa Feans avoid economic hardship.” As outlined in the brief, research over the past decade by the nation’s most internationally respected labor economists has found that higher

minimum wages raise living standards for low-income workers without risking significant job losses.

One of the nation's first living wage laws to apply city-wide to most private businesses, the Santa Fe ordinance is serving as a model for other communities searching for ways to help low-income residents make ends meet.

The living wage ordinance is being defended by the Santa Fe City Attorney's Office joined by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law and the law firm of Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison, LLP. In July, the city's legal team asked the court to end the lawsuit by granting summary judgment for the city. Plaintiff's response to this motion is due at the end of August, and a hearing is expected in the fall.

Information is also available online within our [living wage section](#) or off the Santa Fe Living Wage Network's Web site at www.santafelivingwage.org.