

Arkansas Poised to Follow Michigan, Give Working Families a Raise

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Ballot Initiatives Spurs More States to Raise the Minimum Wage

Little Rock, AR – Working families in Arkansas will receive a long overdue pay increase if the legislature approves a proposed law that it will begin considering today. The Arkansas General Assembly appears poised to follow its Michigan counterpart and raise the minimum wage in response to a grassroots ballot initiative that would otherwise place the issue before Arkansas voters in November. Arkansas would become the twentieth state to raise its minimum wage above the federal minimum wage, which has reached a fifty-year low in its inflation-adjusted value.

As in Michigan, lawmakers in Arkansas refused to raise the minimum wage in recent years, but are now signaling that they will pass an increase before a popular ballot initiative puts the issue to voters in this fall's elections. If the legislature raises the minimum wage, the coalition

supporting the campaign is expected to embrace the legislation and abandon the ballot initiative petition drive.

"We are seeing a remarkable phenomenon around the country. In state after state, lawmakers are rushing to pass minimum wage increases when they see that voters will do it for them. There is a true national groundswell recognizing that work should be rewarded. It's about time," said Michael Waldman, executive director of the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law. The Brennan Center advised the coalition of local faith leaders and community groups including Arkansas ACORN and the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families in drafting the proposed ballot initiative.

The legislature's proposed increase would raise the minimum wage to \$6.25, which is \$1.10 over the federal minimum wage. Had the federal minimum wage kept pace with inflation over the past 38 years, it would be worth over \$9.00 an hour, instead of just \$5.15.

The legislative proposal is not expected to include annual cost-of-living increases, a protection that the ballot initiative was to provide. "Clearly, working families have scored a major victory in Arkansas. But they should not have to ask for an increase every year as the cost of living rises," explained Raj Nayak, associate counsel at the Brennan Center. "States like Florida, Oregon, Washington, and Vermont have already added this protection. Perhaps next session, Arkansas lawmakers will reconsider and add automatic cost-of-living increases as well." In addition to Arkansas and Michigan, the Brennan Center is providing advice to ongoing minimum wage ballot campaigns in other states in which proposed laws provide for annual indexing to track inflation, including Arizona, Missouri, and Ohio.

For more information on the Arkansas and Michigan minimum wage increases and the national movement to raise the minimum wage or to

be connected with local advocates, 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 is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that provides technical and legal assistance to community coalitions and lawmakers promoting policy initiatives to help working families.