

San Francisco Voters Approve \$8.50 City Minimum Wage

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For Immediate Release

November 5, 2003

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Third City Minimum Wage Adds Momentum to Growing Movement

San Francisco -- Four months after a grassroots coalition proposed creating an \$8.50 city minimum wage, San Francisco voters yesterday approved the measure by a 60%-40% margin. When it takes effect in February 2004, the new ordinance will apply to almost all businesses in the city and will raise pay for 54,000 low-income workers. With the recent vote, San Francisco joins Santa Fe and Washington, D.C. as the nation's third city with a local wage law applying to most private businesses. "The Bay Area has one of the highest costs of living in the nation," says Edwin Lopez, a small business owner and 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. "San Franciscans have come together to say that low-income families just can't make it on California's \$6.75 minimum wage. I can't imagine how people are getting by in other states where the minimum wage is still \$5.15." The federal minimum is \$5.15 an hour and has not been raised since 1997.

The initiative, Proposition L, was placed on the ballot by a grassroots signature gathering campaign organized by ACORN, which this summer collected more than 20,000 voter signatures in just two weeks.

Like more than 110 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 law will extend that ordinance to help more low-income families.

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law drafted the San Francisco ballot initiative. A resource for activists and lawmakers promoting reform legislation, the Brennan Center works with cities across the country to design, enact and defend minimum wage and living wage laws. Having assisted San Francisco and Santa Fe in enacting minimum wage ordinances, the Center is helping Madison, Wisconsin become the next city in this growing movement.

“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.”

“As long as the workers who keep our cities going are paid less than they need to survive, we will be out here organizing with our allies to make change,” said Maude Hurd, National President of ACORN. “You can’t let the minimum wage stagnate for six years and not expect to see some anger from down below. The longer Congress and businesses hold out on us, the harder we will fight. We’re taking it to the next level now.”

The erosion of the minimum wage in recent decades has left nearly 30 million Americans — about a quarter of our nation’s workforce — in jobs paying less than \$8.70 an hour. “A low minimum wage encourages businesses to cut the pay of their front-line workers, rather than investing in a high-productivity, high-wage business model,” explains Annette Bernhardt, Senior Policy Analyst at the Brennan Center. “What a healthy minimum wage does is create a level playing field for employers — so that low-road employers can’t undercut those that are paying livable wages to their workers.”

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. Additional information on the Living Wage movement can be found on the Center's [project](#) page.