

Fighting the Current: Why New Mexicans Need a Higher Minimum Wage

Written by Sarah Hyde, Research and policy analyst NM Voices for Children
Friday, 31 August 2018 03:59

Hard-working families in our state are drowning. Families should never have to choose between buying healthy groceries and paying their utility bills, but they do. Kids should be focusing on their work instead of their grumbling stomachs during school, but they cannot help it when their hard-working parents can only provide one meal a day. Workers should not have to take out payday loans for exorbitant fees to afford back-to-school supplies for their kids.

I've heard too many devastating stories about the challenges that New Mexico's minimum-wage workers face, and I believe that hard-working New Mexicans deserve better.

A minimum wage increase is long overdue – it hasn't been raised in almost a decade. As prices increase, purchasing power erodes, and families find themselves sinking deeper into dire straits. Our \$7.50 minimum wage is now worth just \$6.30. Economic insecurity is pervasive in our state. In fact, 31 percent of workers who are paid an hourly wage in New Mexico earn low wages – or less than \$12 an hour.

Nearly a quarter of a million low-wage workers are not only trying to stay afloat when it comes to paying basic living expenses, they are trying to stay afloat with the added weight of other challenges that can accompany economic security, including lack of health care, toxic stress, unsafe neighborhoods, and food and job insecurity.

When workers and families suffer, local economies suffer. In order for our state to be a nourishing and attractive environment where children and businesses can thrive, families need to be economically secure so they have the ability to invest in their futures.

My recent report, *New Mexicans are Worth More: Raising the State's Minimum Wage*, highlights the impacts of incrementally increasing the state minimum wage to \$12 by 2022, protecting workers by prohibiting training wages, and giving counties and cities the freedom to raise their minimum wages even higher.

If the Legislature enacted such a proposal, \$204.8 million a year would be added to the paychecks of New Mexican workers. This achievable policy reform will lessen poverty across the state and offer – low wage workers – a few more dollars to support themselves and their

Fighting the Current: Why New Mexicans Need a Higher Minimum Wage

Written by Sarah Hyde, Research and policy analyst NM Voices for Children
Friday, 31 August 2018 03:59

families.

Most of the workers (65 percent) who would benefit are over the age of 25. About half of the low-wage workers in the state are Hispanic. Women disproportionately work in low-paying service occupations, and these women, who may work as caretakers or early childhood educators, will greatly benefit from a wage increase.

Local economies will reap the benefits, as well. Minimum wage increases help small businesses: multiple studies highlight that in both rural and urban communities, wage increases improve employment.

Research shows that when employees are paid higher wages, they are more productive. Minimum wage increases also correlate with heightened morale, decreased absenteeism, and fewer lost sales. And when families and individuals are earning more, they can spend more money at local businesses, leading to increased tax revenue. Research shows that this impact is especially evident in rural economies, where consumer demand is often weaker.

New Mexico's workers are resilient fighters. They have worked tirelessly to tread water for years, while watching countless nearby states increase their minimum wages to better protect workers and improve economies.

There is no better time for us to help our community members plant their feet on the ground so they can support the people and places that they care so deeply about. It's time for the Legislature to fight for low-wage workers in the same way that these low-wage workers have been fighting to provide a bright future for their families.

Let's show New Mexicans that they are worth more than \$7.50 by increasing the state minimum wage to \$12 by 2022, then continuing the fight until the minimum wage becomes a living wage.

By Sarah Hyde, Research and policy analyst

Fighting the Current: Why New Mexicans Need a Higher Minimum Wage

Written by Sarah Hyde, Research and policy analyst NM Voices for Children
Friday, 31 August 2018 03:59

NM Voices for Children