



Issue Brief

Respecting the Dignity of Work by Lifting the Minimum Wage

What is the Status of Minimum Wage in PA?

The Commonwealth's minimum wage has been \$7.25 an hour for five years and, according to the state Department of Labor and Industry, 5.5 percent of Pennsylvania's workforce — 190,800 people — earn the minimum or less. Of those workers, 65 percent are women, 74 percent are white, 58 percent are under the age of 25 and 60 percent do not have a high school diploma.

Raising the wage will help address the ability of our neighbors to afford necessities, such as paying the rent, buying groceries or filling the car with gas. Although the current \$7.25/hour has remained flat since 2009, housing, food and transportation costs have steadily increased. Pennsylvania is the only mid-Atlantic state that has not raised its wage above \$7.25.

Minimum Wage and Poverty

Fair wages for the poor are expressly supported in Deuteronomy. *"You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer ... but you must pay him his wages on the same day ... for he is needy and urgently depends on it ..."* -- Deuteronomy 24:14-15

Lutherans affirm that God is active in economic life and the mission of Jesus to "bring good news to the poor" includes addressing the conditions that make and keep people poor. As a faith community, we value the principle of sufficiency for all, which includes access to adequate income to meet basic needs and public policies that ensure dignity for those who labor.

Working together as Lutherans on minimum wage expresses our deep commitment to addressing the complex causes of poverty in our state and our call to promote the common good. We all benefit when those who receive the least for their hard work are better rewarded for their labor and can more fully contribute to the life we share. At the same time, we recognize that this is one piece of what must be a broad strategy to relieve poverty

In Pennsylvania, increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour by July 2015 would impact almost 65 percent of our population of low- to medium-income working families, lifting many of the poverty wages they currently work in. More than 80 percent of the million Pennsylvania workers who would benefit from an increase in the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour are adults working more than 20 hours a week and contributing a significant share to their family's income. A quarter of the workers who would benefit are parents with children, and those parents earn just over half of their family's income. Half a million children live in households that would get a boost.

In 2012, the full-time annual income for a person in Pennsylvania making the minimum wage was \$15,080 or just above the 2012 federal poverty threshold for a two-person household (\$14,937), according to a state report released earlier this month about the minimum wage in Pennsylvania. If unchanged this year, the report states, the earnings of an individual working full time at that wage will likely dip below 100 percent of the federal poverty threshold for a two-person household

A recent Quinnipiac poll showed 70 percent of Pennsylvania voters would support a minimum wage hike.

Reasons against raising the wage include the contention that doing so would hurt the economy and result lost jobs. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, data from the thirteen states that raised their wage in January 2014 show there has not been a loss of jobs. In fact, those states that raised the wage showed an overall increase in employment, while those that did not collectively showed no increase.

What is LAMPa asking Advocates to do?

- LAMPa is encouraging advocates to write, call or visit their state lawmakers, requesting that they support an increase in the minimum wage to \$10.10/hour.
- The most important advocacy tactic is to tell the story of your personal, congregational or organizational work with the working poor. Describe the challenges you and they face in the struggle to sustain themselves and their families with dignity. Share a story and connect it to your faith or accompany someone so they can bravely tell their own story.
- Conduct a letter-writing campaign in your congregation or ministry to affirm your support of neighbors who are working for less than what it takes to survive, let alone thrive.