

Mayor Bloomberg Signs New York City Living Wage Law

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With a stroke of the pen this morning, Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed into law the New York City living wage bill, culminating a more than two-year campaign by a coalition of labor, community and religious groups. The largest living wage law nationally in terms of overall impact, it will raise pay immediately for 50,000 home healthcare workers, and later for up to 9,000 child care workers and other caregivers employed by agencies receiving contracts from the city.

"This bill will make a real difference in the lives of more than 50,000 struggling New Yorkers," said Bertha Lewis of ACORN, which led the living wage coalition. "The city is sending a message that our tax dollars shouldn't subsidize poverty."

"Improving pay for these hardworking caregivers is the right thing to do, not just for them and their families, but also for the clients they serve," said Paul Sonn of the Brennan Center, which advised the living wage coalition. "Homecare and child care agencies just can't keep their staff when they pay Wal-Mart wages. It's the seniors, the disabled, and the kids that suffer when these programs can't function."

The living wage rate starts at \$8.10 per hour plus health benefits and will increase by 50 cents each year. The bill requires an additional \$1.50 per hour²⁰ if health benefits are not provided. Capping a parallel campaign led by SEIU Local 32B-J, Mayor Bloomberg also signed into law displaced worker legislation, which will protect janitors and security guards from losing their jobs when buildings in which they work are sold or change contractors.

“But there are thousands of working families across the city that this bill left behind,” reminded Lewis. “The next step is to extend the living wage standards to the city’s economic development subsidy program. Especially in these times of fiscal crisis, we need to be sure that businesses receiving taxpayer subsidies are doing all they can to create good jobs for all New Yorkers. We’ll be working in the new year to help make that happen.”

Drafted by the Brennan Center, the coalition’s living wage bill was narrowed by the city council so as to cover fewer workers than originally proposed. The coalition was disappointed that the council excluded from coverage employees of major corporations that receive taxpayer-funded grants and tax abatements under the city’s economic development program. Economic analysis by the Brennan Center, the Fiscal Policy Institute and Good Jobs New York showed that such broader coverage would cost the affected businesses very little – just a fraction of 1% of annual revenue for a typical company – since most have few low-wage employees. Yet across firms and over time, such a living wage requirement would help raise pay for thousands of low-wage janitors, security guards, cafeteria staff and mailroom workers in a way that would involve little burden on the private sector and no cost at all to the city budget.

“In New York, the suburbs are currently leading the way for the city,” said Dan Cantor of the Working Families Party. “Suffolk County and, just this week, Westchester County have enacted living wage laws that

go even further than the city legislation. We'll be working to build on this foundation to bring a living wage to more of our city's working families."

Further information on living wage issues can be found at: http://www.brennancenter.org/programs/living_wage/index.html.