

Brennan Center Attorneys Will Help Defend Santa Fe Living Wage Law

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Pro Bono Defense Team Says Lawsuit Is Without Basis

Today in state district court in Santa Fe, a group of business interests filed suit in an attempt to overturn Santa Fe's recently enacted city-wide living wage law. The new ordinance, which requires all large employers in the city to guarantee Santa Fe's lowest paid workers at least \$8.50 per hour, was passed by the city council last week.

"These business groups are trying to use the courts to achieve what they couldn't accomplish democratically," explains Paul Sonn, associate counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice, an attorney with the legal team that will assist the city in defending the law. "The people of Santa Fe and their elected leaders want better pay for low-wage workers in their community. More than 1500 local residents, churches and community groups signed on in support of the bill, and the city council approved it by a 7-to-1 vote."

In their lawsuit, lawyers for the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce and a group calling itself “New Mexicans for Free Enterprise” are expected to charge that Santa Fe does not have the legal authority to pass the law, which establishes a modest wage floor for local businesses with 25 or more employees.

“We don’t believe there’s any substance to this legal challenge,” says Mr. Sonn. “Cities enjoy considerable authority under New Mexico law to regulate businesses in their communities to safeguard the public welfare. Santa Fe and Albuquerque have had a range of similar business regulations on the books for years — ordinances governing everything from employment discrimination to rates charges by taxicabs.”

During the city council debate over the bill, opponents vowed to sue if it passed and cited legal defense costs for the city as grounds for rejecting the legislation. In fact, the Brennan Center and other law firms will represent the city *pro bono* in defending the living wage ordinance, donating their time and resources.

The Brennan Center provides legal and technical assistance to living wage campaigns, and other state and local policy reform initiatives, in communities across the nation. For more information, please contact Amanda Cooper at 212.998.6736 or read through our [living wage section](#). Information on the Santa Fe Living Wage Network can be found at www.santafelivingwage.org.