

# California Cities, Community Groups Join Living Wage Litigation Against Cintas

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**California Cities, Community Groups Join Living Wage Litigation**  
*Cite “Unprecedented Threat” to Local Power to Protect the Public*

**Oakland, CA** -- A group of four California cities and fourteen workers' rights, environmental and civil rights organizations filed a friend-of-the-court [brief](#) to defend the power of cities to adopt living wage laws covering businesses with city contracts. The brief responds to a legal attack by the Cintas Corporation on the power of California cities to enact living wage laws ? an attack that also threatens cities' authority to enact environmental and civil rights protections.

Cintas, one of the nation's largest commercial laundries, contracted with Hayward in 1999 to launder city uniforms. As part of the contract, Cintas agreed to pay its employees working on the contract Hayward's "living wage" ? currently \$9.26 per hour plus health benefits or \$10.71 without. But Cintas then continued to pay many of its workers far less.

“I have worked for Cintas for 13 years,” said Francisca Amaral, one of the workers who filed a suit against Cintas seeking back pay. “And yet I still make only \$8.20 an hour without benefits. An extra two dollars and fifty cents an hour would make a big difference for my children and grandchildren who depend on me.” In response to the workers’ lawsuit, Cintas challenged the legal power of Hayward and other California cities to apply living wage laws to work performed under city contracts by businesses that are located outside of the city.

“Cintas’ attack on the power of cities to set requirements for how public contracts are performed is unprecedented,” says Paul Sonn, associate counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, which authored the brief. “When cities purchase services, they have the right to say how they want the work done ? whether it's performed inside or outside the city.”

The Brennan Center and the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) coordinated a group of four cities — Berkeley, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, and West Hollywood — and fourteen organizations — including the Sierra Club, the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, the Asian Law Caucus, ACORN and the East Bay Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice ? that sought to join as amici curiae in the case. “When cities and community groups heard about the implications of this case for civil rights laws, environmental laws, and other areas where cities need to protect the public, they were quick to come on board,” said Amaha Kassa, co-director of EBASE.

In addition to highlighting the threat posed by Cintas’ attack, the brief explains how cities have seen improvement in the quality of services received from city contractors after they enacted living wage laws.

“Communities need to be able to include safeguards to protect public health and safety, the environment and civil rights when they purchase

services from private contractors,” said Tim Frank, senior policy advisor for the Sierra Club. “Cintas is trying to roll back the power of cities to set basic standards in all of these areas,” says Jon Davidson, senior counsel for Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. “That’s why environmental, civil rights and labor groups have come together in response.”