

Groups Launch Ballot Initiative to Raise Florida Minimum Wage

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Ballot Initiative to Raise Florida Minimum Wage Launched

Signature Gathering to Begin

Tallahassee, FL -- On August 6, a statewide coalition called Floridians for All filed with the Florida Secretary of State a proposed ballot initiative to create a state minimum wage for Florida. Florida is one of just seven states without their own minimum wage. The coalition, organized by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) includes community groups, immigrants' rights activists, churches, synagogues and labor unions. Supporters of the Florida minimum wage will have to gather signatures from 490,000 Florida voters by August 2004 to place the initiative on the November 2004 ballot. If approved, the minimum wage would start at \$6.15 per hour and automatically increase each year along with inflation.

ACORN activists are launching a drive, including a door-to-door canvass, to gather signatures from working Floridians across the state. ? In lower income neighborhoods, we expect people to be eager to support this effort, since they will be giving themselves a chance to vote themselves a raise, said Louise Peterson, ACORN Chair in St. Petersburg.

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School drafted the minimum wage ballot initiative and is serving as legal counsel to the campaign. "After years of inaction at the federal level," said Brennan Center associate counsel Nathan Newman, "pushing for higher minimum wages at the state and local level is the necessary alternative route to address the economic needs of low-income families."

The federal minimum wage is currently \$5.15, nearly 40% less than what it was worth in real terms in 1968 ? and Congress has not adjusted it for inflation in six years. During that time, increasing numbers of states and cities have stepped forward to enact higher minimum wages to protect low-income workers. Since 1997, the number of states with minimum wage laws higher than the federal has jumped from six to twelve. In May, Illinois raised its minimum to \$6.15 following a campaign led by ACORN. In July, Rhode Island raised its minimum wage to \$6.75. The highest state minimum wage is currently \$7.15.

More than 100 cities across the country have also enacted local wage ordinances to raise wages for working families. In February, Santa Fe enacted one of the nation's broadest local wage ordinances, establishing an \$8.50 minimum wage for large businesses in the city. In July, San Francisco announced that an ACORN-led coalition had collected enough signatures to place a minimum wage ballot initiative before city voters in November 2003. Also drafted by the Brennan Center, the San Francisco measure will establish an \$8.50 minimum

wage for that city if it is approved in November.

To speak with families who would be affected by the Florida minimum wage increase, business owners who support it, and activists gathering signatures, contact ACORN's Josh Myles at 727-327-6869, cell 727-643-3355.

For more information on the minimum wage ballot initiative, contact the Brennan Center's Nathan Newman at 212-992-8638, cell 917-854-0279.

ACORN is the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 150,000 member families organized into 700 neighborhood chapters in 51 cities across the country. The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School provides technical and legal assistance to community coalitions and lawmakers promoting policy initiatives to help working families.