

Living Wage Law Adopted by St. Louis' Voters Defended in Missouri State Supreme Court

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Media Alert: Living Wage Law Adopted by St. Louis' Voters Defended in Missouri State Supreme Court

What: Oral argument before the Missouri Supreme Court in Missouri Hotel & Motel Ass'n v. St. Louis Living Wage Campaign.

Ruling in a lawsuit involving St. Louis' living wage law, the trial court in this case struck down a state law that potentially limits the authority of St. Louis and other municipalities to adopt local wage policies. The trial judge found that the state law limiting local authority was enacted in an improper and anti-democratic fashion, in violation of the Missouri constitution. The St. Louis Living Wage Campaign and the City of St. Louis will argue that the Missouri Supreme Court should affirm the lower court's ruling.

When: Thursday, September 5, 2002. The court session begins at 9 a.m.; Missouri Hotel & Motel Ass'n is the fourth case on the docket.

Where: Missouri Supreme Court
207 West High Street, 2d floor, Division 1
Jefferson City, Missouri

Who: Paul Sonn, associate counsel of the Brennan Center for Justice, will argue on behalf of respondents, the St. Louis Living Wage Campaign and the City of St. Louis.

The St. Louis Living Wage Campaign is a coalition of community groups, labor organizations and workers seeking decent jobs for hardworking families. The Campaign is led by Missouri ACORN, the Service Employees International Union, and numerous other community groups, religious coalitions and unions.

Joining the Brennan Center in representing the St. Louis Living Wage Campaign are Lisa Van Amburg of Van Amburg, Chackes, Carlson & Spritzer in St. Louis, and Sidney Rosdeitcher of Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton and Garrison in New York.

Background: The people of St. Louis have twice embraced the adoption of a local living wage law. In an August 2000 referendum, 77% of St. Louis' residents voted to enact a city living wage ordinance. Two years later, in July 2002, after the original ordinance was set aside for minor technical defects, the St. Louis Board of Aldermen remedied those flaws and enacted a new, legally sound living wage law.

The lawsuit before the Missouri Supreme Court is the latest in a series of efforts by a segment of the business community to thwart the will of the people of St. Louis on this important issue of economic justice. Arguments by low-wage employers against the living wage have repeatedly failed to persuade St. Louis' voters, the Mayor, and the Board of Alderman. Yet living wage opponents continue to press their case in the courts with arguments about municipal authority already rejected by the trial court in this case.

This lawsuit marks one of the first times the courts have been used to try to block a local living wage law in the United States. A victory for

the St. Louis Living Wage Campaign and the City of St. Louis in this case will remove any doubt concerning the power of cities in Missouri to enact living wage laws, and may become a precedent for the authority of other municipal initiatives around the nation.

The St. Louis living wage law applies to employees of businesses receiving large service contracts or economic development grants from the City of St. Louis. These city contractors and other businesses that benefit from tax-payer funded municipal expenditures must pay a wage that enables a full-time worker to support a family of three at 130% of the federal poverty level – currently, \$9.39 per hour – and provide health benefits.

More than 80 localities around the nation have adopted living wage laws aimed at helping hardworking, low-income families make ends meet.

The Brennan Center's Economic Justice Project seeks to expand access to family-sustaining jobs, thereby combating our nation's widening economic inequality. The Economic Justice Project assists lawmakers and reform coalitions in cities across the country in designing living wage laws and other reform legislation tailored to local needs.

For more information, please contact Scott Schell at the Brennan Center for Justice at (212) 998-6318.