

Testimony of Yannet Lathrop

National Employment Law Project

In Opposition to Amendments that Would Cut or Delay Increases to the Minimum Wage in Boulder County

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Commissioners Levy, Loachamin, and Stolzmann, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My Name is Yannet Lathrop, and I am a senior researcher and policy analyst for the National Employment Law Project (NELP).

NELP is a national nonprofit advocacy organization that for more than 50 years has sought to build a just and inclusive economy where all workers have expansive rights and thrive in good jobs. We partner with federal, state, and local lawmakers and local community-based groups on a wide range of workforce issues, including the minimum wage.

NELP testifies in strong opposition to any amendments that would cut or delay scheduled minimum wage increases. In 2023, when the Boulder County Board of Commissioners adopted an ordinance phasing in a \$25 minimum wage by 2030, it did so unanimously. In a news release announcing the increase, County Commissioners stated that, “The cost of living has continued to rise and our lowest paid workers are struggling to pay for basic needs.”¹

Unfortunately, this continues to be the case. Although inflation has slowed, it remains elevated today² and food prices are projected to grow 3.0 percent in 2025 and another 2.7 percent in 2026.³

Meanwhile, despite minimum wage increases in 2024 and 2025, the cost of living far surpasses Boulder County’s current wage floor (Table 1). The living wage for a single adult today is \$26.18, and for a single parent raising one child it is \$51.68. The gap between the minimum wage and the living wage for a single adult is \$9.61 hourly, or 36.7 percent of the living wage (Table 2).

Not surprisingly, 1 in 10 people in Boulder County are food insecure—meaning that they lack access to enough food due to insufficient money or other resources⁴—and housing is increasingly out of reach for underpaid workers, who would need to work almost 80 hours a week at the current minimum wage just to afford rent for a modest 1-bedroom apartment.⁵

Table 1. Minimum Wage Compared to Estimated Living Wage in Boulder County, 2025-2030

Year	Minimum Wage (As Currently Scheduled)	Living Wage		
		Single Adult	1 Adult, 1 Child	2 Adults, 1 Child
2025	\$16.57	\$26.18	\$51.68	\$28.27
2026	\$17.99	\$26.91	\$53.13	\$29.06
2027	\$19.53	\$27.64	\$54.56	\$29.85
2028	\$21.21	\$28.25	\$55.76	\$30.50
2029	\$23.03	\$28.87	\$56.99	\$31.17
2030	\$25.00	\$29.50	\$58.24	\$31.86
Source: NELP analysis of Boulder County minimum wage ordinance and MIT Living Wage Calculator. Inflation adjustments are based on projected 2025-2028 consumer price index (CPI) by the Congressional Budget Office. Author assumes 2.2 percent CPI in years 2029 and 2030.				

A \$25 Minimum Wage Would Narrow the Gap Between the Wage Floor and the Living Wage

The approved minimum wage of \$25 by 2030 would narrow the gap between the Boulder County minimum wage and the living wage for a single adult. Table 2 shows that the current gap of 36.7 percent would gradually decrease to 15.3 percent by 2030, assuming no changes to the already approved minimum wage schedule.

In its news release announcing the approval of \$25 by 2030, the Board of County Commissioners stated that, "When our lowest paid workers thrive, we all thrive;" and that, "We believe the new minimum wage will benefit the whole of our community." ⁶ Indeed, a higher minimum wage is a win-win for workers, employers and the economy. If the minimum wage is allowed to increase to \$25 by 2030, workers will see an boost of \$8.43 in their hourly wage over the five

years between 2026 and 2030. For workers working part-time (1,040 hours per year), that is a possible income increase of almost \$8,800 over five years, or \$1,750 per year on average. Workers working full-time (2,080 hours per year) could earn an additional \$17,500 over the five years, or \$3,500 per year.

Those additional earnings would make a significant difference not only for affected workers and their families, but also for local businesses as workers' spending power and discretionary incomes increase, and therefore their ability to afford not only the basics but perhaps a few luxuries such as treating their children to ice cream on a Sunday, or a trip to the pumpkin patch in October.

Table 2. The Gap Between the Boulder County Wage Floor and the Living Wage, 2025 and 2030

Year	Minimum Wage	Living Wage (Single Adult)	Difference (\$)	Gap (%)
2025	\$16.57	\$26.18	\$9.61	36.7
2026	\$17.99	\$26.91	\$8.92	33.1
2027	\$19.53	\$27.64	\$8.11	29.3
2028	\$21.21	\$28.25	\$7.04	24.9
2029	\$23.03	\$28.87	\$5.84	20.2
2030	\$25.00	\$29.50	\$4.50	15.3

Source: NELP analysis of Boulder County minimum wage ordinance and MIT Living Wage Calculator. Inflation adjustments are based on projected 2025-2028 consumer price index (CPI) by the Congressional Budget Office. Author assumes 2.2 percent CPI in years 2029 and 2030.

Decades of Research Demonstrate that Higher Minimum Wages Raise Earnings Without Adverse Employment Impacts

Decades of economic research on minimum wage have found that these policies raise wages without affecting employment. For example, a 2022 study by University of California economists analyzed the impact of statewide and local policies increasing the minimum wage to \$15 or more in California, with a focus on restaurant workers and teens—the two groups most affected by minimum wage policies. The study found that these policies had “substantial and ongoing pay increases throughout the treatment period and (...) no significant disemployment effects, even in relatively low-wage counties.”⁷

It is not simply individual studies, but several “meta-studies” surveying research in the field, which indicate that higher minimum wages have had little impact on employment levels. For example, a meta-study of 64 individual studies on the impact of minimum wage increases by economists Hristos Doucouliagos and T. D. Stanley (2009) shows that the bulk of the studies find close to no impact on employment.⁸

Drawing on the methodological insights of Doucouliagos and Stanley, a meta-study by Dale Belman and Paul Wolfson (2014) reviewed more than 70 studies and 439 distinct estimates to come to a very similar conclusion: “[I]t appears that if negative effects on employment are present, they are too small to be statistically detectable. Such effects would be too modest to have meaningful consequences in the dynamically changing labor markets of the United States.”⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have not called this near consensus into question. In fact, during the beginning of the pandemic, we witnessed job numbers drop to record lows as governments imposed lockdowns to contain the spread of the virus. And as economies began to open back up in mid-2020, we saw employers attempting to rebuild their workforces by raising wages¹⁰—showing in real time that higher pay does not automatically lead to disemployment effects, and that in fact, wage increases can be a boon to workers and employers alike.

Conclusion and Recommendations

NELP urges the Boulder County Board of Commissioners to reject any amendment that would cut or delay scheduled increases to \$25 by 2030. Workers are already struggling to afford basic necessities today, and economic projections suggest that the crisis of affordability will continue into the new year and beyond. \$25 by 2030 would narrow the gap between the minimum and the living wage, and could inject more money in the local economy by boosting workers' spending power and discretionary incomes.

Endnotes

1. "Minimum Wage to Rise to \$25/Hour by 2030 in Unincorporated Boulder County" [news release], December 4, 2023, <https://bouldercounty.gov/news/minimum-wage-to-rise-to-25-hour-by-2030-in-unincorporated-boulder-county/>.
2. NELP analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI dropped to 2.9 percent in 2024, down from 4.1 percent the previous year. In the first half of 2025, the CPI was 2.6 percent. The Federal Reserve sees a rate of 2.0 percent as a measure of healthy inflation. Anything above it is considered elevated.
3. "Food Price Outlook, 2025 and 2026," U.S. Department of Agriculture, updated September 25, 2025, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings>.
4. "Food Insecurity among the Overall Population in Boulder County," Feeding America, 2023, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/colorado/county/boulder>.
5. "Out of Reach" [estimates for Colorado and Boulder County], National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2025, <https://nlihc.org/oor/state/co>.
6. "Minimum Wage to Rise to \$25/Hour by 2030 in Unincorporated Boulder County," op. cit.
7. Carl McPherson, Michael Reich and Justin C. Wiltshire, "Are \$15 Minimum Wages Too High?" Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, updated December 25, 2022, <https://irle.berkeley.edu/publications/working-papers/are-15-minimum-wages-too-high/>.
8. Hristos Doucouliagos and T.D. Stanley, "Publication Selection Bias in Minimum-Wage Research? A Meta-Regression Analysis" [abstract], *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Volume 47. Issue 2 (May 2009), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8543.2009.00723.x>.
9. Paul Wolfson and Dale Belman, *What Does the Minimum Wage Do?* Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2014. See also Paul J. Wolfson and Dale Belman, "15 Years of Research on U.S. Employment and the Minimum Wage," Tuck School of Business Working Paper No. 2705499, December 2016, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2705499.
10. Christopher Rugaber, "\$15 Wage Becoming a Norm as Employers Struggle to Fill Jobs," *Associated Press*, July 27, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-minimum-wage-940a6a7530d734242c6f384b751b8033>.

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