

# **Broad Range of Supporters Defends Santa Fe's Minimum Wage**

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## **Broad Range of Supporters Defends Santa Fe's Minimum Wage**

**Santa Fe, NM** - The city of Santa Fe today will file a legal brief in New Mexico's Court of Appeals in its case defending the city's landmark minimum wage ordinance. The city is being joined by the association representing New Mexico's other cities and towns, together with legal scholars, workers' rights advocates, and religious and civil rights groups who are seeking to file amicus (friend of the court) briefs in support of Santa Fe. The Santa Fe ordinance is one of the nation's first local laws that raises the minimum wage for workers at all large private businesses in the city.

In a ruling last summer in the case, *New Mexicans for Free Enterprise v. City of Santa Fe*, a trial court upheld the ordinance, which raised the minimum wage in Santa Fe to \$8.50 an hour, boosting pay for 17,000 low-income residents. The law was passed by the Santa Fe City Council in 2003 to respond to the inadequate federal minimum wage, which has been stuck at \$5.15 an hour since 1997. The current federal

minimum wage is now 40% below its real value in 1968, and across the U.S. almost 30 million Americans about a quarter of the workforce work in jobs paying less than the federal poverty level for a family of four.

Since 1994, more than 120 cities have enacted living wage laws that increase the minimum wage for workers at businesses performing city contracts. Now, in an important new trend, cities like Santa Fe are enacting broader minimum wage laws that raise pay for workers at all private businesses in their communities not just those performing city contracts. San Francisco, Milwaukee, Madison and Washington, D.C. have enacted laws similar to Santa Fe's in recent years.

The New Mexico Municipal League, which represents all 102 of New Mexico's cities and towns, together with the City of Albuquerque and more than 20 of the nation's leading scholars of local government law are today seeking to file an amicus brief supporting Santa Fe in the appeal. A separate brief is being submitted by a diverse coalition of religious, civil rights, workers' rights and political groups. This broad range of support for the city underscores a growing consensus that state and local governments must step in to protect low-income workers since the federal government has refused to act.

"Santa Fe's Monsignor Jerome Martinez y Alire put it so well when he explained the need to raise the minimum wage in our community: No person should work full-time and live in poverty," said Carol Oppenheimer of the Santa Fe Living Wage Network.

The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law helped Santa Fe draft the living wage ordinance, and advises cities and states across the country on minimum wage and living wage legislation. The brief on behalf of the city was prepared by a legal team consisting of the Santa Fe City Attorney, the Santa Fe firm of Jones, Snead, Wertheim, Wentworth & Jaramillo, the New York firm of Paul Weiss Rifkind

Wharton & Garrison, LLP and the Brennan Center.

For more information, please contact Paul Sonn at (212) 998-6328.