Low-wage workers fighting for a living wage

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2. Inclusion of CalWORKs parents in the Living Wage law.

CalWORKs grants are diverted to private employers that pay them out as wages at the San Francisco minimum wage of $8.82 per hour.

Employers would be required to supplement wages for CalWORKs parents to $10.77 per hour.

3. Annual cost-of-living increases based on the Bay Area Consumer Price Index to keep up with inflation.

With this year’s Consumer Price Index increase, the hourly rate in the living wage law would rise to $11.04.

Improving wages for the least-paid workers performing services for residents improves the standard-of-living of all San Francisco workers, helps revitalize the City’s economic base, and creates more local jobs.

Many of the non-profit and homecare workers live in low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco. When these workers have more dollars in their pockets, they spend in their neighborhoods in San Francisco.

Inclusion of CalWORKs parents would make the living wage law more effective and improve the standard of living for all San Francisco workers.

The City contracts out to non-profit workers care for the elderly and disabled, provide food and shelter without laying off staff and cutting services. If non-profits do not receive adequate funding, they have the protection of getting a waiver, unless they are large enough to be able to absorb the increased labor costs.

The criteria for the waiver is that the highest paid managerial position is not paid more than six times the wage of the lowest paid employee.

The cost of increasing funding to non-profits and a county agency for homecare workers is estimated around $20 million annually.

Supporters point out that it is a matter of political priorities for the City to come up with the money.

The City found $16 million to renovate the Harding Park area for the World Golf Championship with Tiger Woods.

- Karl Kramer

The Struggle to Raise Wages Continues

While the majority of the Board of Supervisors support raising wages for more than 15,000 low-wage workers, Board President Aaron Peskin stalled them in committee.

At the April 5 Budget and Finance Committee meeting, Supervisor Aaron Peskin, who has been on the fence, sided with Supervisors Sean Elsbernd and Bevan Dufty in delaying a decision on the Ammann/McGoldrick amendments to the living wage law.

These amendments will significantly raise wages for more than 15,000 low-wage workers: homecare workers, non-profit workers on city service contracts and airport workers.

Also, for the first time CalWORKs parents who work for a welfare grant will be included in the living wage law.

Supervisors Chris Daly and Ross Mirkarimi, who have both signed on as co-sponsors, wanted to send the amendments to the Board for a vote.

Supervisor Daly, chair of the committee, has put the amendments on hold until Supervisor Peskin changes his position.

Low-wage workers and their allies are organizing to budge Supervisor Peskin and move these amendments out of committee.

In addition, they are campaigning to get Mayor Gavin Newsom to incorporate funding for the wage raises into the budget that he presents to the Board of Supervisors on June 1, as well as make sure that he signs the amendments into law after the Board passes them.

The key amendments are –

1. Parity for home care and non-profit workers with workers at for-profit companies that contract with the City.

2. Inclusion of CalWORKs parents who work for a welfare grant and will be included in the living wage law.

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Workforce Workers Included in Living Wage Law

The Board of Supervisors at their April 11 meeting passed the amendment introduced by Supervisors Jake McGoldrick and Tom Ammiano to have the number of work hours required to maintain eligibility for the county General Assistance (GA) grant and Personal Assisted Employment Services (PAES) stipend based on the amount in the living wage law. The inclusion of single adults in the county workforce program would treat with respect the work that they do – cleaning MUNI buses, sweat streets and doing janitorial work at General Hospital, GA recipients receive $340 per month for 32 to 40 hours of work. The amendment will decrease hours to 30 hours per month.

- Karl Kramer

The San Francisco Living Wage Coalition

Who We Are

The San Francisco Living Wage Coalition is a grassroots movement of low-wage workers and their allies fighting for economic justice. We believe that everyone who works full time should be able to survive on what they earn, without relying on public assistance or charity to support their families.

What We Do

We educate, organize and mobilize to demand that our tax dollars and use of public property do not go to businesses that pay poverty wages.

History

The Living Wage Coalition was initiated in 1998 by labor unions, community organizations and religious congregations to develop a movement led and democratically accountable campaign to expand health care to cab drivers and others “a model for other jurisdictions across the nation who also struggle with a large number of low income workers.” - Mark Gruberg

Moves to Expand Health Care

In the absence of a national commitment to universal health care, San Francisco is moving forward on several fierce battles to expand health care coverage for uninsured workers and residents:

- Supervisor Tom Ammiano has introduced legislation at the Board of Supervisors to provide coverage for some 40,000 workers employed in San Francisco.
- The San Francisco Health Department has completed a funding study for a health care plan for San Francisco’s 5,000-plus taxi drivers.
- Mayor Gavin Newsom is seeking to expand health care coverage to all uninsured San Franciscans through a city-sponsored defined benefits program.
- The Board of Supervisors has passed amendments strengthening enforcement of the Health Care Accountability Ordinance (HCAO), which covers workers for companies that provide services under city contracts or lease city property.

The Ammiano-sponsored Worker Health Care Security Ordinance would require for-profit employers with 20 or more employees and non-profit employers with 50 or more employees to contribute toward employee health care services or provide reimbursement for health care expenses incurred by the employee, according to a formula contained in the ordinance. The legislation is currently pending before the Board’s Budget & Finance Committee.

The taxi driver health plan has been the works for several years. The funding study, which was released in mid-March, contemplates coverage through the San Francisco Health Plan, a city-sponsored insurer that provides coverage to more than 30,000 San Franciscans.

The taxi study explores a number of funding options designed to keep the plan affordable to cab drivers. In addition to driver contributions, other possible funding sources include cab companies, holders of taxicab permits (medallions) and the taxi-riding public.

Mayor Newsom has endorsed the goal of covering uninsured San Francisco residents through a combination of government funding, employer contributions and user payments. He and Supervisor Ammiano have convened a 41-member group at the Universal Healthcare Council, to study the issue. Chairing the group are Sandra Hernandez, Executive Director of the San Francisco Foundation, and Lloyd Dean, president and CEO of Catholic Healthcare West. The council is supporting a study of its own to be completed within 100 days and report on its recommendations by mid-May.

THE MOBILIZER

ART BY RIN TEMPLETON

The HCAO amendments increase the penalty paid by covered companies that do not provide health care for their workers from $1.50 to $2 per work week. They establish the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) as the agency responsible for enforcement of the ordinance and provide the OLSE with enhanced powers of investigation and enforcement. Insufficient enforcement has been a problem.

Supervisors Ammiano and Jake McGoldrick co-sponsored the HCAO amendments. Supervisor Fiona Ma added her name as a co-sponsor before final passage.

Dr. Mitch Katz, director of the Department of Public Health, attended a March 15 briefing on the release of the study. He has called San Francisco’s push to expand health care coverage to cab drivers and others “a model for other jurisdictions across the nation to follow.” - Mark Gruberg