

Kentucky Wage RAISE COALITION

www.raisethewageky.org

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NEW COALITION URGES PASSAGE OF STATE MINIMUM WAGE BILL IN 2007

Frankfort, KY – Today a partnership of faith-based organizations, grassroots organizing groups, labor unions, low-income advocates, and professional associations announced their formation of a coalition to urge passage of a state minimum wage.

With the passage of ballot initiatives in six states on November 7, 29 states and Washington DC have laws setting the minimum wage above the federal level of \$5.15 per hour. It has been a decade since Congress last raised the minimum wage. The actual purchasing power of the federal minimum wage is at its lowest level since World War II.

Representative J.R. Gray announced the details of the bill that he would seek to pass in the 2007 Kentucky General Assembly. The bill contains three key provisions:

- raise the minimum wage to \$7.00 per hour as of June 2007 or to the federal minimum wage if it is greater;
- add an annual cost of living increase; and
- abolish the current tip credit of \$2.13 per hour taken by employers and provide that tipped employees be paid the state minimum hourly wage.

Representative Gray stated, “It is time for the Kentucky legislature to stand up for low-wage workers and require that they are decently compensated for their work. We must no longer allow a minimum wage that pays a single mother with one child working full-time year-round nearly \$3,000 less than the federal poverty line.”

In the 2006 session of the General Assembly, Representative Gray and 22 co-sponsors introduced House Bill 378 that would have established a state minimum wage. The bill passed out of the House Labor and Industry Committee but failed to move forward on the House floor. Representative Joni Jenkins and Senator Ernesto Scorsone have also prefiled companion bills this fall that also would establish a state minimum wage.

At today’s announcement Crystal Blackburn, a Louisville mother of a five-year old said she has seen what low wages have done to the people in her community. “It shouldn’t matter if you’re flipping burgers; if you’re working hard, you should be treated fairly. But we’re not. People need to realize that this is someone’s wife or someone’s mother. We need a raise, and we need respect. Raising the minimum wage is part of this. It’s a step in the right direction, and it would give people hope.”

Father Patrick Delahanty, associate director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, said “We have a moral responsibility and opportunity to increase the minimum wage to insure that working families, especially single mothers, have enough money to meet the basic human needs for themselves and their families.”

The minimum wage increase proposed by Gray would provide a raise to 275,000 Kentuckians according to statistics provided by Debra Miller, Director of Public Policy for Kentucky Youth Advocates. “Today we want to dispel the myth that only teenagers work at minimum wage. In fact, 83% percent of the affected workers in Kentucky are twenty or older. And 102,000 are married and 60,000 are parents. Clearly, raising the minimum wage is one way to address Kentucky’s high child poverty rate,” she said.

“We care about our students whose parents make minimum wage.” said Frances Steenbergen, President, Kentucky Education Association. “We see firsthand the effects of poverty in their lives, even while their parents work hard to provide for them. Everyone will benefit from an increased minimum wage, especially our children.”

The website for the Kentucky Raise the Wage Coalition will be updated regularly to provide data about the impact of raising the minimum wage, workers who would be affected, and how interested persons can take action to support a state minimum wage. The domain name is www.raisethewageky.org.

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Association for Community Organizations for Reform Now • KY Association for Community Action
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KY Education Association (KEA) • Jefferson County Teachers Association • AFL-CIO