

Kansas Action Network

Coalition for Workers' Rights, Social Justice and Economic Fairness

Community Action
Network
Flint Hills Living Wage
Coalition
GI Forum
Grow Kansas
International Association
of Machinists and
Aerospace Workers
District 70 and Locals
2799, 733, 774, 834
Kansas AFL-CIO
Kansas Ecumenical
Ministries
Kansas Farmers Union
KAW Valley Living Wage
Alliance
Lawrence Coalition for
Peace and Justice
Manhattan Alliance for
Peace and Justice
Peace and Social Justice
Center of South Central
Kansas
Plumbers and Pipe
fitters Local 441
Salina Central Labor
Union
Sisters of St. Joseph of
Concordia
Society of Professional
Engineering Employees
in Aerospace
Southeast Kansas
Independent Living
Resource Center
Statewide Independent
Living Council of
Kansas
Topeka Center for Peace
and Justice
Topeka Independent
Living Resource Center
Topeka Federation of
Labor
Topeka LULAC
Tri-County Labor
Council of Eastern
Kansas
United Methodist
Church East Kansas
Conference
United Steelworkers of
America Local 3092
Wichita Hutchinson
Labor Federation

January 9, 2007

Testimony presented to the Senate Committee on Commerce
in Opposition to SB 71
by Kansas Action Network

To the Honorable Chairpersons Brownlee and Jordan and Committee Members:

Kansas Action Network is a coalition of various groups and individuals concerned with workers' rights, economic fairness, and social justice. We oppose SB 71 because it will remove a basic worker protection from Kansas statutes – the state minimum wage rate.

The state minimum wage rate reflects the value the state places on the labor of our citizens and the degree to which we want to ensure Kansans have an opportunity to get by on the pay they earn. Kansas wants its citizens to be responsible; for themselves, for their families; and their households – and yet, if SB 71 passes, the state will tell us that we can expect no help from our Kansas government in earning a wage that will sustain life. Even our state public assistance program, TANF, requires participants to work in order to receive public benefits. It is only fair, then, for the state to tell employers they must pay a minimum rate.

Most Kansas workers are covered by the federal minimum wage of \$5.15. If SB 71 passes, that won't change. But those Kansas workers who earn less than the federal minimum will be plunged into even greater economic insecurity. The KDOL has reported there are some nineteen thousand working Kansans making less than \$5.15 per hour right now who struggle keep a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs, and food in their bellies. At our current embarrassing and immoral minimum rate of \$2.65, a worker must work multiple jobs just to earn enough to cover a fraction of those basic survival needs.

There is overwhelming public support nationally for an increase in the federal minimum wage. In the past election, all 6 states having ballot initiatives to increase their minimum wage rates were passed with hefty margins. Does the Kansas legislature believe that Kansans are completely different than the rest of the nation on this issue? Only 5 states in these United States do not have a minimum wage – Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, and South Carolina. These states are found at the bottom of state rankings for public education, per capita income, public health, and many other indicators of the quality of life their citizens experience. These states are not the models Kansas wants to use in providing for our own citizens. Within the past few years, 29 states have raised their minimum wage rates above the current federal level. Our neighbors to the east and west, Colorado and Missouri took that step in November. Even Arizona, a state that previously had no minimum wage, voted to establish a minimum wage in the last election and at a rate higher than the federal! To the best of my knowledge, no state has ever rescinded a minimum wage rate in the nation's history. This is not a national "first" Kansas really wants on its history books.

We've said in our state that we value work. We want our people to work, to be productive citizens who pay their taxes. But, if we value work, then we must also value WORKERS. At this moment in our national history, when a majority of the states and even the federal government openly acknowledge low wages as a key contributor to poverty, and when citizens across the nation overwhelmingly support raising minimum wages, the passage of SB 71 in Kansas will send a very clear message. It is not a message, however, that reflects the values of our state or its people. The members and supporters of the Kansas Action Network call upon you, as responsible lawmakers, to defeat this negative message and show Kansas values responsible workers and responsible businesses. Thank you for your consideration of our serious concerns on this important issue.

Kansas Action Network is a broad coalition with diverse views seeking a common ground in the pursuit of economic justice.

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