



Raising the Minimum Wage Would Benefit Black, Brown, and Other People of Color in Nebraska, Who Are Overrepresented in Our Lowest Paid Workforce

By Rachel Vaca-Lubischer on 1/10/2022

Raise the Wage Nebraska¹ has begun collecting signatures to get the Raise the Minimum Wage Initiative² on the November 2022 ballot. This would allow Nebraskans to vote to gradually increase the minimum wage from \$9 to \$15 by 2026. This could mean the difference between a yearly income of \$18,000 and \$31,000, reducing poverty and changing the lives of approximately 227,000 Nebraskans.³

However, a Minimum Wage is not a Living Wage. A Living Wage is the hourly rate employers need to pay for an individual to be able to support the basic needs of themselves and their family.⁴ Looking at housing alone, employers would need to pay a minimum hourly wage of \$16.91 for an individual to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent in Nebraska.⁵ In the Omaha-Council Bluffs area, this wage would be \$18.98.⁵ Factoring in the costs of food, child care, transportation, and more, a family of two adults and two children would need \$20.19 per hour per adult to make a Living Wage in Nebraska.⁴ A \$15 minimum wage is not a Living Wage. And yet, the move from \$9 to \$15 would make a difference in the lives of thousands of Nebraskans who are struggling to make ends meet.

Raising the minimum wage will decrease the racial income gap. People of color in Nebraska, who make up 20% of Nebraska's workforce but 32% of our lowest paid workforce, will disproportionately benefit from increasing the minimum wage.³ Raising the minimum wage will directly increase the earnings of

- 42% of Hispanic Nebraskans
- 38% of Black Nebraskans
- 31% of Native American, Asian, and Other Race/Ethnicity Nebraskans
- 20% of White, non-Hispanic Nebraskans

Increasing the income of the approximately 73,000 People of Color in Nebraska who are paid the lowest possible wage is a step towards decreasing the racial income gap.³ However, it is racism at the individual, institutional, and system levels that has created and maintains this gap. Raising the minimum wage does not directly target racism, which is functioning as it was designed – to unfairly advantage White people while disadvantaging People of Color. When we pass race-neutral policies, racism will continue to recreate disproportionate outcomes among racial and ethnic groups.

At MORE, we fully support the Raise the Minimum Wage Initiative, and we will continue advocating for a Living Wage until all Nebraskans are paid enough to support themselves and their family. Most importantly, we will continue advocating for anti-racist action until race and ethnicity can no longer be used to determine life outcomes.

To learn more about Raise the Wage Nebraska, please visit [RaisetheWageNebraska.org](https://p2a.co/ndtu9ft). Pledge to sign the petition and receive updates on when a petition circulator will be in your area by signing up at <https://p2a.co/ndtu9ft>.

To learn more about the Movement in Omaha for Racial Equity (MORE), please check out our website at MOREOmaha.org, and contact us any time at MOREInfo@MOREOmaha.org.

Rachel Vaca-Lubischer is a MORE Board Member.

Sources:

1. Raise the Wage Nebraska. (2021). About. <https://raisethewagenebraska.org/>
2. Nebraska Secretary of State Petition Sponsor Sworn Statement. (2021). Petition: Raise the Minimum Wage. <https://sos.nebraska.gov/sites/sos.nebraska.gov/files/doc/elections/Petitions/2022/Nebraska%20Minimum%20Wage%20Initiative.pdf>
3. Economic Policy Institute. (2019). Minimum Wage Simulation Model using data from the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Congressional Budget Office. https://files.epi.org/uploads/EPI_15_by_2024_state_tables.pdf
4. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (2021). Living Wage Calculation for Nebraska. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/31>
5. National Low Income Housing Coalition. (2021). Out of Reach 2021: Nebraska. <https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/files/reports/state/ne-2021-oor.pdf>