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July 21, 2015

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Historic Vote to Raise Wages and Crack Down on Wage Theft

After listening to several hours of sometimes impassioned public testimony, the Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 Tuesday to approve Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas' motion to give workers their first [living wage](#) increase since 2007.

The Board also approved his and Supervisor Hilda Solis' motion to crack down on [wage theft](#), as well as Supervisor Sheila Kuehl's motion – which he voted for – to gradually raise the [minimum wage](#) throughout the county's unincorporated areas to \$15/hour.

"It is imperative that we address income inequality in Los Angeles County, not only by raising both the minimum wage and the living wage, but also by cracking down on wage theft," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. "It's the just thing to do."

"Current minimum and living wage standards are so insufficient that many workers – even those with full-time jobs – don't earn enough to cover their families' basic needs, and must rely on safety net programs administered by the county and funded by taxpayers," he added.

Living wage is the minimum compensation that companies must pay their employees to secure contracts with Los Angeles County to perform cafeteria, janitorial, landscaping and other low-wage functions.

The county's living wage ordinance affects more than 220 contracts employing about 4,200 workers. Established in 1999, the living wage has increased only once – eight years ago.

Currently, workers receive an hourly living wage of \$9.64 with health insurance or \$11.84 without health insurance, for an annual take-home pay of \$20,051.20 or \$24,627.20, respectively, if they work 40 hours a week.

Under Supervisor Ridley-Thomas' motion, their pay would increase to:

- \$13.25 per hour by 2016
- \$14.25 per hour by 2017
- \$15.00 per hour by 2018
- \$15.79 per hour by 2019
- and annually thereafter based on changes in the Consumer Price Index.

To help ensure that employers pay the mandated rate, the board voted unanimously Tuesday to look into strengthening the county's efforts against wage theft, which include workers being paid less than the minimum wage and being denied overtime pay, and meal and rest breaks.

"Wage theft is a crime that disproportionately affects people of color, immigrants and women," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. "We must protect the workers slated for wage increases by developing an innovative, collaborative and vigorous enforcement effort."

"Wage theft should not be tolerated any more than other forms of criminal activity," he added. "I hope the business community will partner with us, and not criticize this effort as anti-business or burdensome regulation or intrusion."

Aside from authoring or co-authoring the living wage and wage theft ordinances approved Tuesday, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas in June successfully carried a motion to raise the [poverty wage](#), the hourly rate paid to In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) caregivers who look after blind, disabled or elderly patients, allowing them to stay at home instead of going into institutionalized care subsidized by the state and county governments.

The differences among minimum, living and poverty wages are explained [here](#).

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