

san jose community members deliver initiative for more hours to part-time workers

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SAN JOSE (BCN) — Dozens of community members delivered an initiative at San Jose City Hall today calling for employers to give part-time workers additional hours.

South Bay Labor Council Executive Director Ben Field said there's a crisis of underemployment in the San Jose community and it's devastating for working families.

About 30 people from religious- and community-based organizations gathered in a conference room at the City Clerk's Office to submit the "Opportunity to Work" initiative to qualify for the November ballot.

The initiative would require businesses to give part-time employees more hours before they hire more part-time or temporary workers.

The group walked to the office under a banner that read "Opportunity." They held signs that listed the benefits they would receive from more hours, such as groceries, medications and peace of mind.

City Clerk Toni Taber met with the group for about five minutes at a conference room where she went over requirements for the initiative and petition.

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Sarah Delte, 35, was part of the group with a sign that read "opportunity to work = apartment for family."

She works part-time as a food preparer at KFC and cashier at Jack in the Box, where she receives about \$10.30 an hour and works about 20 hours in all between both jobs.

Delte, who was born and raised in San Jose, said her rent is close to \$3,000 and feels that she's being pushed to move to another city where housing is more affordable.

As a single parent raising her son who turned 9 years old today, she is dependent on government assistance through food stamps, MediCal and Section 8 housing, but wants to become independent of federal aid.

Delte said she is also supportive of raising the hourly minimum wage to \$15.

"Offering additional hours to part-time workers is the right thing to do. Not doing that deprives them of benefits that they ought to have," Field said.

San Francisco and SeaTac, Washington have passed legislation that addresses the issue, but the San Jose initiative would be the first of its kind nationwide to head to the ballot, Field said.

About 66,000 people who work in San Jose have part-time or varied schedules working in industries such as food service, hospitality, and retail, Field said.

Many employers avoid hiring full-time workers so they won't have to provide them necessary benefits such as health insurance, according to Field.

The initiative was brought forward through Silicon Valley Rising, a coalition of leaders from the faith, civil rights, immigrant, housing and homeless communities, Field said.

The City Attorney has 15 days from today to provide language for the initiative and the group will need to circulate a petition and notice of intent, Labor Council political director David Urhausen said.

About 19,000 signatures will need to be collected by the end of April and checked by the City Clerk to present the measure before voters, Urhausen said.

