

Silicon Valley part-time workers file petition to work more hours

By [Jessica Floum](#)

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Photo: James Tensuan, Special To The Chronicle

Richard Hess pours coffee for a customer in downtown San Jose, Calif. on Thursday, Nov. 12, 2015.

Kartma is run by people transitioning out of homelessness.

San Jose labor advocates, religious leaders and hourly workers on Tuesday submitted to city officials a proposed ballot measure that would force large and mid-size companies to offer their part-time employees more hours before hiring additional temps.

Organizers submitted more than 34,700 signatures to place the Opportunity to Work Initiative on the city's November ballot, city officials said. At least 18,852 valid signatures, as verified by the county's Registrar of Voters, are required.

If approved by voters, the initiative would apply to all companies with more than 35 employees.

The initiative is the latest effort of the Silicon Valley Rising movement, which is trying to address the region's growing affordability crisis for low-wage earners. Community leaders and coalition members have also campaigned for affordable housing and minimum wage increases.

"This is another step toward framing more properly the questions of the wage gap and wealth gap in Silicon Valley," said the Rev. [Jon Pedigo](#), board member of the [Silicon Valley Rising coalition](#) and pastor of Our Lady of [Guadalupe Church](#) in East San Jose. "We see this as a moral issue, and we see this as a unifying issue where everyone will win."

Facebook, Microsoft, and Apple, some of the biggest names in tech, have proudly touted the fact that they have done away with gender pay gap. But that doesn't mean the tech industry overall is suddenly paying men and women equally across the board. Hired

Media: Wochit Tech

One-third of San Jose workers earn less than the average annual rent for a one-bedroom home in the city, and families are increasingly struggling to make ends meet, according to an April report by the [Center for Popular Democracy](#), Working Partnerships USA and the Fair Workweek Initiative.

"We've reached a crisis point," Pedigo said. "There are so many people every day that are displaced."

More than 40 percent of the estimated 162,000 people who work hourly jobs in San Jose rely on part-time work or variable schedules for their income, the report said.

Variable work schedules cause workers' incomes to fluctuate monthly, making it harder for earners to consistently support their families and pay rent. The burden falls hardest on women and minorities. More than 60 percent of hourly workers are women, according to the report. Almost 70 percent are people of color.

[Alejandra Mejia](#), 29, makes \$12 an hour as a part-time manager at a McDonald's in San Jose. A single mother of three, Mejia depends on her monthly income to feed her kids.

The four of them live in a single room in a friend's house. She can't afford her own place, and she can't depend on receiving a consistent monthly income. Over the past eight years, her weekly shifts have fluctuated — usually between 20 and 30 hours per week.

Mejia asked her boss for more work hours. Last week, the restaurant hired new people and gave Mejia only eight hours. Mejia will make \$400 this month, almost \$200 less than the average monthly income she depends on.

"I'm assuming I'm going to get money to support my kids, to feed my kids and to pay my rent," Mejia said. "I don't know what I'm going to do this month."

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Large companies consistently fail to treat employees like Mejia as people, as opposed to “cogs in a wheel,” Pedigo said. He called their choice to spread wages among part-time employees instead of hiring full-time workers “reprehensible.”

“We have a choice we have to make about how we move forward,” Pedigo said. “Do we move forward together based on the common good, or do we move forward based on the bottom line and the profit margin?”

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