

# Silicon Valley County Passes \$19.06 Wage for Contractors

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Working Partnerships USA



Santa Clara County – which covers much of Silicon Valley – took a major policy step on Dec. 16 regarding the living wage for contractors by lifting the hourly pay to \$19.06 and approving paid sick leave for them, according to Working Partnerships USA.

The dollar amount – which supporters are calling “the nation’s most comprehensive living wage” – will start in July 2015 and increase as the cost of living in the technology-rich area does.

County board of supervisors will meet next year to work on steps to implement the new wage rate and related employment guidelines that they approved for contractors.

The decision affects how the county spends \$2.2 billion annually in taxpayer money on contractors [in an increasingly expensive part of the country](#). Overall, Santa Clara County employs about 17,000 people. The ordinance also includes health and retirement benefits for county contractors.

“This vote represents a crucial step forward to closing the economic divide in Silicon Valley,” Derecka Mehrens, executive director of Working Partnerships USA, wrote in a note to supporters.

Working Partnerships USA – as part of the Silicon Valley Living Wage Coalition – joined forces with SEIU Local 521, the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council, community organizations and county residents to back passage of the higher hourly pay.

County supervisors on Dec. 16 also passed a plan for contractors to have a “fair” workweek, which calls for predictable and flexible schedules. Workers and their families have voiced concern for years about the lack of such schedules, which can cause undue stress and costs when planning for child care, attending school or pursuing a second job.

Supervisors, as part of the vote, called for equal opportunity when hiring contractors, meaning that veterans, former foster care youth, former prisoners and the disadvantaged have a “fair” chance at securing these jobs.

Contractors won the right to speak up about employment conditions without the fear of retaliation, Working Partnerships USA said.

The hourly pay of \$19.06 for contractors exceeds the \$12.01 living wage that a single person in the county needs to cover monthly costs, according to the [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#). Santa Clara County is home to more than 1.8 million residents with [10 percent of them living in poverty](#).

While Silicon Valley is home to Apple, Facebook and Google, not all jobs in the area pay high wages or salaries. Supporters of higher wages note that a third of all workers in the county lack enough pay to cover monthly living costs.



Santa Clara County residents who back higher hourly wages make their views known. On Dec. 16, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors approved a higher hourly wage for contractors - and the amount is expected to be enough for a single worker to cover monthly living costs. Photo source: Working Partnerships USA

The state hourly wage is \$9 and that will increase to \$10 in 2016. San Jose, California – a major city in Silicon Valley – has [an hourly wage of \\$10](#). In November, city leaders [approved an affordable housing plan](#) after hearing from residents and community groups.

*[Working Partnerships USA](#) is a community-labor organization dedicated to addressing the root causes of inequality for workers and communities of color.*