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San Jose Workers Win \$15 Hourly Wage, in Heart of Silicon Valley

By Paul Nyhan | Equal Voice News (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/author/paul-nyhan/>) on November 16, 2016 5:01 pm

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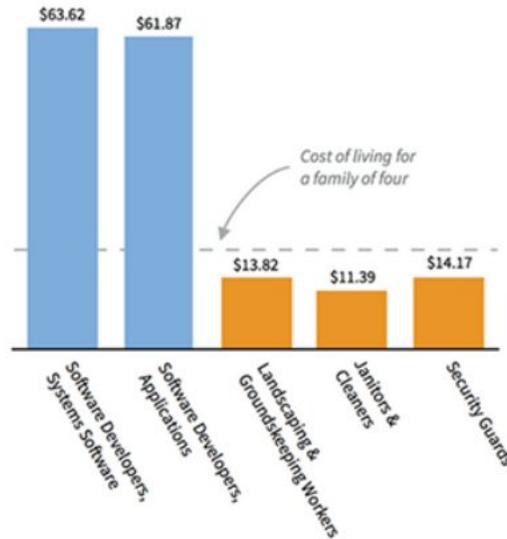


San Jose joined the growing number of cities raising the minimum wage this week, when the City Council unanimously voted to boost it to \$15 an hour by 2019, a move that will increase hourly pay for 115,000 workers.

The city has been at the forefront of the national movement to increase the minimum wage. In 2013, the city boosted its basic wage (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/raising-san-joses-minimum-wage-a-qa-with-marisela-castro>) from \$8 an hour to \$10 an hour following a campaign sparked, in large part, by college students.

The Nov. 15 vote was another success in the first-ever coordinated push to raise a minimum wage throughout the high-tech region, according to Silicon Valley Rising (<http://www.siliconvalleyrising.org>), a grassroots coalition of organizations and workers. Other Silicon Valley cities in Santa Clara County, including Cupertino, Los Altos, Palo Alto, Mountain View and Sunnyvale, have already raised the minimum wage.

Median Wages for Tech and Contract Workers
Santa Clara County, 2014



Source: California Employment Development Department

“This vote marks an important step in our regional approach to raise the floor and put money in the pockets of workers struggling to pay for rent and food,” Derecka Mehrens (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/silicon-valley-tech-can-do-better-with-hourly-wages/>), executive director of Working Partnerships USA (<http://www.wpusa.org>) which co-leads the Silicon Valley Rising coalition, said in a statement.

In California’s third-largest city, workers, including public school teachers (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/silicon-valley-rent-teachers-cant-teach-and-students-cant-learn/>), have been battered by the rising cost of living. Rent for a one-bedroom apartment averages \$1,800 a month, and a third of the region’s workers are struggling, Silicon Valley Rising says.

The new plan will raise the city’s minimum wage to \$12 this July, \$13.50 on Jan. 1, 2018 and \$15 on Jan. 1, 2019.

“I work two jobs, but with rent going up, I can’t make ends meet,” Yasmin Fernandez, who works at a fast-food restaurant and a gas station, said in the statement.

Silicon Valley Rising estimates that Latinos will comprise more than half of the San Jose workers who will benefit from the \$15 hourly wage in 2019. Asian workers will make up 23 percent of those who benefit.

White workers will comprise 21 percent of those who receive higher pay. Blacks and other racial groups will make up 6 percent of the workers who will see a larger paycheck.

San Jose is home to more than 1 million people. Its poverty rate is nearly 12 percent, according to federal data. One U.S. Census Bureau study says California is actually the poorest state (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/california-the-golden-state-is-actually-the-poorest-of-all/>) in the U.S., largely because of expensive housing.

San Jose is only the latest in a growing number of cities and states that have increased local minimum wages in recent years, even as the federal minimum wage has remained stuck at \$7.25 an hour. Only last month in Illinois, the Cook County Board of Commissioners approved raising the region's minimum wage from \$8.25 an hour to \$13 an hour over the next four years.

"This is so important because the minimum wage raise will occur for over 200,000 workers throughout the county!" One Northside (<http://onenorthside.org>), a community organization in the Chicago suburbs, said (<http://onenorthside.org/breaking-cook-county-passes-minimum-wage-increase>) after the vote. "A suburban Cook County low-wage worker's current annual earnings are roughly \$14,500. These are the workers who have a 70 percent chance of staying in their lo-paying jobs out of sheer necessity."

With more than 5.2 million residents, Cook County, which includes Chicago, is the second largest in the United States. It has a poverty rate of 17 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

In last week's general election, voters in four states – Washington, Arizona, Colorado and Maine – approved higher minimum wages. In April, California Gov. Jerry Brown approved a plan (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/california-enacts-highest-statewide-minimum-wage-in-the-nation>) that will raise the state's minimum wage to \$15 by 2022.

"Amidst the turmoil in Washington, Silicon Valley is leading the way with innovative policies that reduce inequality and support working families," Mehrens said.

Paul Nyhan

(<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/author/paul-nyhan/>) is the senior writer for Equal Voice News. About the top image: Supporters of a \$15 minimum wage hold a press conference in San Jose, Calif. on Nov. 15. Photo courtesy of Silicon Valley Rising

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🔍 Minimum wage

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