



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

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Researchers announce Living Wage rate

Report shows workers need at least \$16.74 an hour to meet basic needs and support a family

The community campaign for a living wage has received another boost with the release of new research showing that workers in Vancouver need at least \$16.74 an hour – and \$16.39 an hour in Victoria – to support their families.

The living wage calculation was released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, and the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria at a September 25 news conference.

Noting that B.C. has had the highest child poverty rate in Canada for the past five years, First Call's Adrienne Montani told the news conference that a living wage is fundamental to the struggle to eliminate child poverty in our communities.

“For those who seek to end child poverty, this is truly where the rubber hits the road,” she said. “What does it say about our economy when families are doing all the right things – working hard and working long hours – and yet have to choose between paying the rent or putting food on the table?”

Erna Calingasan, an HEU member and food service worker employed by Sodexo, told the news conference that she holds down two jobs and works 12 hours a day, sometimes seven days a week, just to make ends meet for herself and her son.

Unlike the legislated minimum wage, the living wage calculation is based on what it costs a two-earner family with two young children to meet such basic expenses as housing, food, child care and transportation. It allows families to escape poverty and severe financial stress, ensure healthy child development, and participate fully in their communities.

But according to CCPA researcher Seth Klein, the calculation is still a modest one. It does not include, for example, debt payments, savings for retirement, home ownership, savings for higher education or anything beyond minimal recreation and entertainment.

“One of the guiding principles of the project,” he explained, “was that it had to be reasonable and conservative.”

He said the living wage is first and foremost a call to private and public-sector employers to sustain families, but is also a call to government for programs and services that can help shift certain costs off the shoulders of individual families.

“For example, if we had a universal public child care system for children under six years old,” he said, “the living wage calculation would no longer have to include over \$600 per month in child care costs.”

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The report also pointed out that a living wage benefits employers, as well as workers and their families. Living wages, explained Klein, are shown to improve recruitment and retention, enhance workers' morale and create opportunities for employers to promote themselves as a living wage business or agency.

The study, *Working for a Living Wage: Ensuring Paid Work Meets Basic Family Needs in Vancouver and Victoria*, is a joint initiative of the CCPA and Simon Fraser University's Economic Security Project.

The full report is available on the HEU website www.heu.org, where you can also sign the online living wage petition for support service workers employed by Sodexo, Aramark and Compass.

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