

Living Wage Initiative

Information Packet

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Resolution for a Living Wage

Passed by the Texas A&M Faculty Senate December 13, 2004

Whereas, the starting wages of non-exempt (hourly) Texas A&M University employees currently are as low as \$6.15/hour¹; and

Whereas, the starting wages of many TAMU employees rank near the bottom versus comparable positions at other universities in the Big Twelve, even when adjusted for the cost of living²; and

Whereas, the Texas A&M Department of Human Resources estimates that 801 workers currently are working in job classifications with wages of \$9.00/hour or less (\$18,792 annually)³; and

Whereas, wages less than \$18,792 annually fall below:

- \$130% of the current federal poverty guideline for a family of three (\$20,371)⁴,
- The current standard for fair market rent in Brazos County (\$23,840 for a 2 bedroom apartment)⁵, and
- The current estimated self-sufficiency budget for a family of three in Brazos County (\$31,033)⁶; and

Whereas, wages less than \$18,720 annually may force Texas A&M University employees to rely on federal government assistance including, but not limited to, food stamps and Section 8 housing; and

Whereas, employees making poverty-level wages face personal hardships and often are forced to depend on public assistance, take second jobs, and live in sub-standard housing; and

Whereas, every employee at Texas A&M University is vital to the fulfillment of our teaching, research, and service missions⁷; and

Whereas, the implementation of a living wage would benefit valued employees, Texas A&M University, and the Bryan/College Station community⁸; therefore be it

Resolved that,

1. The Texas A&M University Faculty Senate endorses the implementation of a living wage for all Texas A&M employees.
2. The living wage be defined as a wage that meets or exceeds 130% of the federal poverty level⁹ guidelines for a family of three (\$9.76/hour in 2004 based on 2088 hours/year) plus standard benefits.
3. The central administration of Texas A&M University will be responsible for the implementation, funding, and administration of the living wage.

4. The University will make annual adjustments as necessary to maintain the living wage provided to employees at or above 130% of the federal poverty level guidelines for a family of three.
5. No increases in work assignments, reductions in force, or reductions in employee benefits will be initiated to cover the cost of providing a living wage.
6. All new hires by the University will be covered under this living wage resolution.
7. As part of its long-term commitment to provide a living wage for all employees, should the University contract out work currently being performed by A&M employees, the University will require contractors to pay those workers wages no less than 130% of the annual federal poverty level guideline plus basic benefits equal to those of A&M employees.
8. A report of the University's efforts to comply with this living wage resolution will be included in the president's annual address to the Faculty Senate.

Living Wage Resolution
Passed by Texas A&M Student Senate April 27, 2005

S.R. 05 (F) 1

**The Student Senate
57th Session
Texas A&M University**

Resolution S.R. 05 (F) 1

Introduced By: Beth Stierman
Aaron Tatyrek
Kenya Wells
Daniel Weizel

Action Taken _____

Certified By: _____
Logan Renfrow
Speaker of the Senate

Wage Resolution

Whereas: The starting wages of non-exempt (hourly) Texas A&M University employees currently are as low as \$6.36/hour; and

Whereas: The starting wages of many TAMU employees rank near the bottom versus comparable positions at other universities in the Big 12, even when adjusted for the cost of living; and

Whereas: The Texas A&M Department of Human Resources estimates that 801 workers currently are working in job classifications with wages of \$9.00/hour or less (\$18,792 annually); and

Whereas: Wages less than \$18,720 annually may force Texas A&M University employees to rely on federal government assistance including, but not limited to, food stamps and Section 8 housing; and

Whereas: Employees making poverty-level wages face personal hardships and often are forced to depend on public assistance, take second jobs, and live in sub-standard housing; and

Whereas: Whereas, every employee at Texas A&M University is vital to the fulfillment of our teaching, research, and service missions; and

Whereas: The implementation of a living wage would benefit valued employees, University, and the Bryan/College Station community; and

Whereas: President Gates has created a Task Force on Wages and Benefits to formulate recommendations on this issue;

Therefore

Let it be

Resolved: The Student Senate urges the Task Force on Wage and Benefits to find a way to fund this initiative.

Let it be

Further

Resolved: The Student Senate urges an innovative solution to funding this initiative, including but not limited to internal reallocation of the budget, external funding, state budget appropriations, the Available Fund, and the Former Students and Development Foundation; increases in student tuition should only be used as a last resort.

LIVING WAGE FACT SHEET

- The Living Wage Coalition has defined a living wage in the Bryan/College Station area as 130% of the federal poverty level plus basic benefits. Currently, this equates to \$9.76 per hour, \$20,371 annually.¹⁰ This is a "bare-bones" income that includes little or nothing in the way of amenities such as entertainment, travel or educational enrichment, but it allows a working family to live with dignity.
- Texas A&M's Department of Human Resources reports that at least 800 individuals currently earn less than this living wage. Currently, there are 90 full-time non-exempt employees making less than \$7.00/hour, 381 full-time non-exempt employees making less than \$8.00/hour, 330 full-time non-exempt employees making less than \$9.00/hour, and 379 full-time non-exempt employees making less than \$10.00/hour.¹¹
- During the last few years, workers in categories such as food service and custodial staff have seen their real wages fall dramatically as their workload has increased. Consider, for example, the situation facing many A&M custodians. A&M employs 330 custodial workers who are separated into 16 crews. Together, they clean 340 buildings totaling 12.2 million square feet. In the last year, the University has reduced the custodial staff by over 100. As a result each employee is responsible for 32,000 square feet while at other major institutions, custodians average 25,000-26,000 square feet.¹² However, custodial staff at Texas A&M are paid a starting wage which is significantly lower than many comparable Big Twelve universities. For example, A&M custodians' starting pay is \$6.57/hour, while the University of Texas custodial staff's starting pay is \$8.51/hour – which equates to a net difference of \$3,744 annually even after cost of living adjustments are made.¹³
- This decrease in relative real wages and increase in workload is by no means unique to Texas A&M University. The real wages of many working people in the United States have declined since 1975, creating a growing gap between the economically well-off on the one hand and wage earners in the industrial and service sectors of the economy on the other.
- Although job cuts are making work much more difficult for many staff at A&M, the number of faculty is being increased. The university's labor policies are creating the impression that improvements in faculty have been funded in part by the University's cuts in non-exempt staff and failure to improve workers' wages and working conditions.
- An analysis of actual wages paid to individual non-exempt employees estimates that the cost of bringing the non-exempt employees now making less than a living wage up to \$9.79 per hour would be approximately \$4.6 million (See Page 8). This amounts to only .4% of the university's total annual expenditures.¹⁴

Cost of implementing a Living Wage to Texas A&M

The cost to the University of implementing a living wage depends upon how many employees are currently below the proposed living wage and the total cost per hour, including fringe benefits.

The following data were provided to the The Living Wage Coalition by the University.

Full-Time employees by salary level

		Employees
\$5.01 to	\$6.00	0
\$6.01 to	\$7.00	90
\$7.01 to	\$8.00	381
\$8.01 to	\$9.00	330
\$9.01 to	\$10.00	379

Costs per worker include medical benefits, which depend upon family size, and the following items which vary with the wage:

TRS Ret		6.00%
Soc Sec		6.20%
MediCare		1.45%
Sick Leave	96 hrs/year	4.60%
Annual Lv*	120 hrs/yr	5.75%
12 Holidays	96 hrs/yr	4.60%
Total %		28.59%

Hence, for example, a \$1 increment in the hourly wage of an employee would cost the university approximately \$1.29 per hour.

Without knowledge of the distribution of employees within each wage range above we cannot calculate the exact cost of moving to a living wage. However, we can provide the following range of cost estimates yielding a “best guess” of approximately \$4.6 million.

	Total cost per year by wage category		
	Max	Min	Best Guess
\$6-7	913,441	674,207	793,824
\$7-8	2,843,911	1,831,151	2,337,531
\$8-9	1,577,176	699,983	1,138,579
\$9-10	793,743	-	313,529
Total	\$6,128,271	\$3,205,340	\$4,583,463

Standards for Calculating a Living Wage

In this draft, we have elected 130% of the federal poverty level as the standard minimum for determining our minimum wage. We have chosen this index for two primary reasons. First, we believe it is the minimum acceptable standard for a public university. Public dollars should not be used to keep employees in poverty and implementing such a standard would help to raise families out of poverty. Second, the federal poverty level is adjusted annually to account for inflation; thus, by adjusting the minimum starting wage to this index annually, Texas A&M can guarantee that their living wage keeps up with inflation. Because we recognize that there are many different standards for determining a living wage, in this appendix we include two alternative indexes which the university might elect to use. More information about these indexes can be found at <http://livingwagecampaign.org/index.php?id=1954>

Fair Market Rent

Fair Market Rents are estimated annually by the department of Housing and Urban Development to help ensure sufficient, affordable rental housing is available. They are gross rent estimates and include shelter rent and the cost of utilities, except telephone. By fair market rent standards, a rental unit is considered affordable if the rent does not exceed 30% of the renter’s income. If you want to recommend that Texas A&M chooses to index the living wage to fair market rent, you must first select a unit size ranging from efficiency to four bedroom. The table below lists the fair market rent and necessary wages to afford one and two-bedroom units in Brazos County. Further information can be found at the National Low Income Housing Coalition website:

<http://www.nlihc.org/oor2003/data.php?getstate=on&getcounty=on&county%5B%5D=brazoscounty&state%5B%5D=TX>

Unit Size	One Bedroom	Two Bedroom
Fair Market Rent	\$472.00	\$596.00
Hourly Income	\$9.08	\$11.46
Annual Income	\$18,880	\$23,840

Family Budgets and Self-Sufficiency Standards

Although the federal poverty guidelines are a common indicator of poverty, they are not without weaknesses. The official poverty measure is based solely on food costs and the percentage of income families spent on food in the 1950s. Although it is refigured annually, it does not take into account the increased share of income families are spending on costs such as housing and child care relative to food. In contrast, family budgets calculate the costs for every major budget item, including housing, childcare, healthcare, food, transportation, and taxes. If you want to recommend that Texas A&M chooses to index the living wage to Self-Sufficiency standards, you must first choose a family size. As an example, in the table below, we have listed the hourly wage and annual income for a family of one working parent with 1 child and one working parent with two children living in Brazos County. More information on these budgets can be found on the economic policy institute website at:

<http://www.epinet.org/cgioutput.cfm?template=epiucalc.XaFMys&title=Basic%20Family%20Budget%20Calculator>

Family Size	1 Parent/1 Child	1 Parent/2 Children
Hourly Income	\$10.77	\$13.09
Annual Income	\$22,401	\$27,222

Notes:

Self-sufficiency budgets include a monthly expenditure for health care. In the two examples featured (1 parent/1 child and 1 parent/2 children) the monthly health care allocation is \$256.00. Because A&M pays for some of the employee’s health care premiums, this budget allocation may be decreased. According to the 2004 annual enrollment booklet, A&M premiums for employee and child range from \$25.59 - \$196.55 per month depending upon the chosen plan. For example, if the 1 parent/1 child budget is chosen and the employee elects Scott & White as their health care provider, the necessary allocation for health care may decrease from \$256 to \$126.73 (provided no co-pay is needed in that particular month). Thus, the annual budget total is \$23,985.72 and the hourly wage is \$11.53.

Budget numbers on EPI’s website are based upon 1999 data. To calculate the equivalent amount in 2004, these numbers have been multiplied by the change in cost of living between 1999 and 2004 (<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/epicalc.pl>)

Federal Poverty Guidelines

We have chosen 130% of the federal poverty level as our recommended guideline because it is the cut-off for determining food stamp eligibility. Families that make less than 130% of the federal poverty guideline are considered poor enough to qualify for public assistance. However, you may choose to raise this level or choose a different family size. Should you want to use a different percentage of federal poverty level or a different family size, the chart below lists the 2004 federal poverty level guidelines as determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/04fedreg.htm>

2004 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States	
Size of Family Unit	Poverty Guideline
1	\$9,310
2	\$12,490
3	\$15,670
4	\$18,850
5	\$22,030
6	\$25,210
7	\$28,390
8	\$31,570
For family units with more than 8 members, add \$3,180 for each additional member. (The same increment applies to smaller family sizes also, as can be seen in the figures above.)	

**History of Merit & Mandatory Raises
Texas A&M University
FY2001-FY2005**

Employees earning less than \$10.00 per hour received, on average, a raise of \$1.70 per hour over a four-year period covering FY2001-FY2005. These data reflect both merit and mandatory raises. It should be noted that, in FY2001, many of the lower-paid employees received a mandatory raise of \$100.00 per month after one year of service. In FY 2004, all employees earning less than \$30,000 per year received a mandatory raise of \$50 per month. Thus, at \$.86 per hour, mandatory raises accounted for over half of the total raises given to low wage workers during this period. Having accounted for these mandatory raises, then, merit wages given to workers making less than \$10 per hour were just \$.84 per hour **over the four-year period**. These data underscore the position that merit raises have not provided sufficient means for the lowest paid workers to earn a living wage.

Source: Texas A&M University, Office of Human Resources (2005)
Adapted by: G. McDonnell (2005)

**History of Health Premiums
FY2001-FY2005**

A review of health care costs for all full-time A&M employees is reflected in the table below. Please note that the analysis is on Scott & White, only. Data are available on A&M Care I, A&M Care II and FirstCare HMO and will be analyzed upon request.

Health Plan: Scott & White

FY 05	FY 04	FY 03	FY 02	FY 01
EE Only 10.00	EE Only 0.00	EE Only 0.00	EE Only 0.00	EE Only 19.96
EE+Sp 154.35	EE+Sp 121.87	EE+Sp 72.74	EE+Sp 36.40	EE+Sp 70.72
EE+Ch 126.73	EE+Ch 98.62	EE+Ch 58.86	EE+Ch 29.28	EE+Ch 58.89
EE+Fam 222.34	EE+Fam 182.27	EE+Fam 108.80	EE+Fam 55.11	EE+Fam 110.89

Additional Information: Scott & White

Increases in co-payments for full-time employees, from FY01-FY05: \$5.00 - \$25.00.
Current deductible for medicine for full-time employees is \$100.00 per person.

Source: Texas A&M University, Office of Human Resources (2005)
Adapted by: G. McDonnell (2005)

History of Raises in Pay and Health Premiums: A Hypothetical Case

It is often difficult to understand the personal impact of the history of health premiums and wage increases at the University. To put these numbers in context, we present the following hypothetical case based upon the real data provided by the Texas A&M University Office of Human Resources.

2001

Robert, a father of two children, ages four and six, worked as a full-time custodian at Texas A&M University.

- Robert's gross salary was
 - \$7.00 per hour
 - \$14,616 per year (2088 hours/year)
 - \$1,218 per month
- Deductions included
 - Health care premiums (Scott and White Insurance) for Robert's family of \$110.89/month
 - His monthly co-pay (assuming one visit to the doctor for the entire family) was \$5.00/month
- Adjusting *only* for health care costs, Robert's net monthly salary was \$1102.11

2001-2004

Over the next four years, Robert received merit and mandatory raises totalling \$1.70 – the average raise for employees making less than \$10/hour. As his income increased, he also saw inflation rise and his health care premiums double.

2005

- Robert's gross salary is
 - \$8.70 per hour
 - \$18,165.60 (2088 hours/year)
 - \$1,513.80
- Deductions include
 - Health care premiums (Scott and White Insurance) for Robert's family of \$222.34/month.
 - His monthly co-pay (assuming one visit to the doctor for the entire family) is \$25.00/month
- Adjusting *only* for health care costs, Robert's net monthly salary is \$1266.46

Thus, even when Robert receives the average merit raise for an employee at his level, when increases in health care are calculated, Robert only sees an average raise of \$164.35/month. Further, if we adjust for inflation between 2001-2005, we find that *Robert's real raise is only \$58.21 per month.*¹⁵

Impact of Living Wage on Individuals Receiving Government Assistance

One of the concerns associated with living wage initiatives is that raising employee wages may result in a subsequent loss of benefits for families currently receiving government assistance. This is a legitimate concern and one we would like to briefly address. Individuals whose families live on an income below 130% of the poverty level could potentially be receiving Food Stamps, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and Section 8 housing assistance. If individuals receive only a small increase in their wages, an increase not sufficient to raise them out of poverty to a living wage, it is possible that such a small increase in wages could be completely offset by a subsequent loss in social programs, or an increased cost in those programs. However, it is important to note that while these individuals may be no better off due to a raise, they are certainly no worse off than before.

Let us take this scenario as an example. Assume an individual is receiving food stamps, EITC and Section 8. If that individual gets a raise, but a raise insufficient to raise him above 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL), he will still qualify for food stamps. However, as long as he stays under 130% FPL, every \$100 raise in income will result in a loss of \$24 in food stamps. Note that the individual still receives a net raise of \$76. In addition, because Section 8 is figured on 30% of an individual's income, for every \$100 increase, his rent will increase by \$30. The net raise is now \$46. In addition, the individual may lose approximately \$20 of their EITC. The resulting net raise is then \$26. It is important to note that even with all of these deductions, the individual is still experiencing a net gain in income.¹⁶

At this time, we have no way to determine how many, if any, Texas A&M employees would be facing such a scenario. While this seems to be discouraging to the implementation of a living wage, we would like to suggest otherwise. If people are ever to see a rise in their income, they must pass through the income range where they lose eligibility for government subsidies and see an apparent rise in costs – the range where they won't see much of a wage gain. BUT, once they are through this range of income, they get to keep more of this wage gain and it will make a significant difference in their daily lives. Further, being freed of reliance on federal assistance or charity, they should experience a greater sense of pride and independence.

Thus, it is essential that the living wage be a significant increase in order to move families toward self-sufficiency. Wages that enable self-sufficiency respect human dignity, encourage individual responsibility, and help build caring, healthy families. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen... There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum and livable income for every American family." We encourage Texas A&M to join in this vision and guarantee a livable income for all A&M employees.

*Big 12 University Wage Comparisons 2002 and 2005***Big 12 Starting Wage Chart May, 2002¹⁷**

University	Starting Wage	Annual Wage
Iowa State University	\$9.19	\$19,115
University of Texas	\$8.51	\$17,701
University of Missouri	\$8.21	\$17,076
University of Colorado	\$8.20	\$17,056
Kansas State University	\$8.12	\$16,890
University of Kansas	\$8.10	\$16,848
University of Nebraska	\$7.59	\$15,787
*Texas A&M University	\$6.36	\$13,229
*Texas Tech University	\$6.36	\$13,229
*Oklahoma State University	\$6.00	\$12,480
*University of Oklahoma	\$5.15	\$10,712

Big 12 Starting Wage Chart, April 2005¹⁸

University	Starting Wage	Annual Wage
Iowa State University	\$10.18	\$21,256
University of Texas	\$9.89	\$20,650
University of Missouri	\$8.54	\$17,832
University of Colorado	\$8.80	\$18,375
Kansas State University	\$8.49	\$17,728
University of Kansas	\$8.49	\$17,728
University of Nebraska	\$7.55	\$15,764
*Texas A&M University	\$6.57	\$13,718
*Texas Tech University	\$6.20	\$12,946
*Oklahoma State University	\$6.15	\$12,846
*University of Oklahoma	\$5.15	\$10,753

To calculate annual wage, all starting hourly salaries multiplied by 2088

*Annual salary below federal poverty level guidelines for a family of three.

***Big 12 University Wage Comparison 2005:
Adjusted for Cost of Living Differences¹⁹***

University	Starting Hourly Wage	Starting Annual Wage
Iowa State University	\$10.18	\$21,256
University of Texas	\$9.89	\$20,650
University of Colorado	\$8.80	\$18,375
University of Missouri	\$8.54	\$17,832
Kansas State University	\$8.49	\$17,728
University of Kansas	\$8.49	\$17,728
University of Nebraska	\$7.55	\$15,765
*Texas A&M University	\$6.57	\$13,718
*Texas Tech University	\$6.20	\$12,946
*Oklahoma State University	\$6.15	\$12,846
*University of Oklahoma	\$5.15	\$10,753

*Below 2005 Federal Poverty Guidelines for Family of Three

College and University Living Wage Campaigns

Agnes Scott College, GA	Rhodes College
American University/Washington College of Law (Washington, D.C.)	Stanford University
Brown University	Swarthmore College, PA
Bucknell University	University of California - San Diego
College of William and Mary	University of Connecticut
Cornell University	University of Illinois - Chicago
Duke University	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Earlham College, IN	University of Minnesota
Fairfield University, CT	University of Northern Illinois
Georgetown University	University of Pittsburgh
Harvard University	University of Wisconsin Madison
Johns Hopkins University	University of Tennessee
Kent State, Ohio	University of Virginia
Northwestern University	University Pittsburgh (county-wide ordinance that would impact campus workers)
Princeton University	Valdosta State University, GA

Source: <http://www.livingwagecampaign.org/index.php?id=1960>
 April 4, 2005

Sample of University Just Employment Policy

A Just Employment Policy for Georgetown University (adopted Spring, 2005)

Available: <http://www.georgetown.edu/svp/justemployment.html>

Georgetown University, as a Catholic and Jesuit institution, is committed to providing fair and competitive compensation packages for University employees and full-time contract workers who provide services on its campuses in Washington, DC. This wage is based on a variety of factors, including input from the Advisory Committee on Business Practices, the salary and benefits structure of Georgetown employees, existing University collective bargaining agreements and the University's overall financial resources and ability to sustain academic excellence.

In principle, this policy is designed to provide a floor for minimum total compensation appropriate for full-time Georgetown workers in the Washington, DC metropolitan area; takes into account the costs of housing, health care, child care, transportation, taxes, food and other basic necessities, known as a living wage or just wage, as well as the need to compensate employees without jeopardizing services or jobs; reflects Georgetown's employee compensation system and existing union contracts; provides an ongoing mechanism to evaluate employee compensation; and ensures that, where appropriate, hourly wage earners will receive equivalent pay for equivalent work.

Given these principles, Georgetown will increase total compensation for full-time contract workers over 24 months:

FY 2006 (July 1, 2005) Increase total compensation to a minimum of \$13.00 per hour, an increase from the current minimum of \$11.33

By FY 2008 (July 1, 2007) increase total compensation to a minimum of \$14.00/per hour

After FY 2008, compensation packages will be adjusted annually taking into consideration Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers in the Baltimore-Washington Area (CPI-W) and regional labor market conditions.

This proposal enables the University to provide regular compensation increases for all full-time employees; recognizes negotiated union agreements already in place; addresses the need to adjust salaries to prevent compression and layoffs; provides a substantially greater total compensation package than called for by existing metro-area wage ordinances; is fiscally responsible and enables Georgetown to sustain academic excellence; and recognizes the value of making annual adjustments.

This proposal affirms Georgetown's commitment that everyone in the Georgetown community has a right to a safe and harassment-free environment, that all working members have the right to freely associate and organize, and that the University will respect the rights of employees to vote for or against union representation without intimidation, unjust pressure, or hindrance in accordance with applicable law. Georgetown will provide, and will seek commitments from its contract employers that they will provide, full-time jobs when possible and part-time or temporary work only when necessary. This proposal commits Georgetown to either directly provide, or require its contractors to provide, certain types of benefits to all of Georgetown workers. These include:

- Access to appropriate grievance procedures.
- Equal access to Georgetown community resources that are regularly made available to directly-hired employees: library privileges, English as a Second Language courses, Georgetown University Transportation Shuttles, and general financial planning information.

Georgetown will attempt to avoid employee job loss as the result of implementation of this policy. If Georgetown no longer contracts work to a subcontracting firm, the University will prioritize employment of any workers who presently work under those subcontractors at Georgetown University, to the extent legally possible.

Finally, Georgetown commits that to the extent its contractual arrangements permit it to do so, it will disclose pertinent economic details to the appropriate university bodies, such as the Advisory Committee of Business Practices, regarding the implementation of this policy, including wage scales, benefit packages, grievance procedures, and neutrality policies.

To the extent appropriate, Georgetown University will revise all existing contracts to reflect and include this policy before they are renewed, and all new contracts will reflect and include this policy.

The Advisory Committee on Business Practices will continue as an ongoing body with its current charter.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What does "living wage" really mean?

At an absolute minimum, a living wage is the amount a person would need to earn to stay above the federal poverty level. In 2000, this amounted to \$17,050 a year for a family of four, or \$8.20 per hour for a full-time, year round worker. However, a true living wage varies city by city because it takes into consideration the cost of living (housing, food, child care, health care, transportation, etc.) in each location.

The local Living Wage Coalition has chosen 130% of the federal poverty level as their recommended guideline for living wages in the Bryan/College Station area. Currently this equates to \$9.79 per hour or \$20,363 annually. This amount was chosen because it is close to the cut-off for determining food stamp eligibility. Families that make less than 130% of the federal poverty guidelines are considered poor enough to qualify for public assistance.

Q. Don't we already have a "minimum wage" law? Why do we need a "living wage" too?

The minimum wage is no longer a family-supporting wage. In the past, the minimum wage provided enough income to lift a family of three out of poverty. During the 1960s and 1970s the annual earnings of a full-time, year-round minimum wage worker roughly equaled the poverty level for a family of three. However, during the 1980s the cost of living rose steadily but minimum wages did not. Recent increases have still not restored all the lost value. Based on U.S. Census estimates of average poverty thresholds in 1999, full-time, year-round minimum wage earnings were nearly 20% below the poverty level for a family of three. Unlike the federal minimum wage, which produces earnings below the poverty level, a living wage is a pay rate designed to ensure that workers earn wages at, or above, the poverty line. Although a living wage is still a low wage, the extra disposable income available to a full-time living wage worker compared with a full-time minimum wage worker is substantial.

According to a 2000 poll by Lake Snell Perry & Associates ("A National Survey of American Attitudes Toward Low-Wage Workers and Welfare Reform"), Americans overwhelmingly supported the idea that anyone who worked full-time should not live in poverty. Four out of five of those polled (84%) agreed that "as a country, we should make sure that people who work full-time should be able to earn enough to keep their families out of poverty." The study also found that Americans think it takes an income much greater than current poverty thresholds to provide for oneself and one's family. Nine out of 10 respondents (92%) felt that a family of four needed at least \$25,000 annual income just to meet all expenses and 69% thought an income of at least \$35,000 was necessary.

Q. Will paying a living wage really reduce poverty?

Some critics argue that living wages will not reduce poverty because most of the people impacted do not live in poor households. Evidence from an Economic Policy Institute evaluation of the Baltimore living wage ordinance shows that this claim is not true. Interviews with a sample of workers covered by the living wage revealed that their average household income

before being paid a living wage was \$13,632. The interviews also showed how important a living wage worker's wages were to their family's well-being. An overwhelming majority of the workers interviewed were the primary wage earner in their household, bringing home an average of 68% of their family's income.

Q. Won't raising wages result in job loss for the very workers you are trying to help?

The threat of job loss is a largely emotional argument that is often injected into public policy debates to sway the public and decision makers. By the same logic, the job loss threat should apply to any expense a firm might face. For example, one could argue that job losses might occur if energy costs go up, if taxes rise, if new equipment or facilities are necessary, or if executive or management-level employees receive large salary increases or bonuses.

In reality, a rise or fall in overall employment depends on factors that are more far-reaching than paying a living wage. Any potential employment/unemployment impacts of a living wage would be mitigated by the overall financial health of an area. The non-effect of living wages on unemployment has been documented in studies of cities that have living wage ordinances. For example, the Economic Policy Institute concluded in 1998 that after four years in force, the Baltimore living wage increase did not result in any discernible job loss. On the other hand, a different study of the Los Angeles living wage law, the nation's most far-reaching living wage law, found that total employment on city service contracts declined by about 3% over the first eighteen months of implementation (Sander and Lokey). However, the authors of this study concluded that the increase in unemployment might have occurred because Los Angeles, unlike Baltimore, did not put contracts up for competitive bids. Instead, they chose to re-negotiate contracts with existing vendors. The authors also concluded that implementing a competitive bidding process would help "hold down both costs to the city and the loss of worker jobs."

The vast majority of economic research concludes that there is little or no loss of jobs associated with small wage increases. The clearest evidence for evaluating the unemployment impact of increases in the wage floor comes from the increases to the federal minimum wage in 1996 and 1997. Following these increases the economy continued to produce jobs at near record rates. In February 2000 only 7.2% of the working age population was not in the workforce compared to 11% in 1994.

Q. Aren't most low-wage workers teenagers?

About half of all minimum wage workers are over 25 years of age; and a much higher percentage of workers being paid under \$7.60 an hour are also over 25. Extensive analysis of past and proposed wage policies has determined that the primary beneficiaries of a living wage would be low-wage workers who are disproportionately adult, female, and people of color. Additionally, most of the workers who would benefit are members of low-income families. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found that about 11.8 million workers (10.1% of the workforce) would receive an increase in their hourly wage rate if the minimum wage were raised to \$6.15 per hour. Seventy-two percent of these workers were adults (age 20 and older) and 59.2% were female. Because the minimum wage workforce is disproportionately minority, 15.1% of those affected

by the increase would be African-American and 17.4% of those affected would be Hispanics (compared to 11.6% and 10.6% respectively of these groups' total workforce representation).

Q. Won't paying living wages to entry-level workers be a disincentive for them to seek more training and move into higher paying jobs?

Millions of people who have low-wage jobs have to work multiple jobs, or lots of overtime, just to support themselves. That doesn't leave much time for participation in training during their non-work hours. By saying that the problem is a lack of initiative on the part of these low-income workers is blaming the victim.

But even if workers in low-wage jobs did participate in training and move up to higher paying jobs, these lower paying jobs would still exist and would still be filled by other low-wage workers who might have to work multiple jobs or lots of overtime to support themselves and their families.

Q. What if the type of work done by low-wage workers isn't worth higher pay?

No matter the job performed, whether preparing hamburgers or taking care of children or the elderly, or cleaning motel rooms, workers must earn enough money to pay the rent and buy food and other basic necessities. It is also important to understand that the way the "worth of workers" is determined has changed in recent years. Throughout the first seventy years of the 20th century improvements in worker efficiency (measured as productivity) provided the basis for steady wage increases for workers. This relationship changed dramatically over the last 30+ years. For example, between 1973 and 1998 worker productivity increased by 46.5%. Over the same period, hourly wages for average workers declined by 6.2% (adjusting for inflation), and weekly wages declined by 12%. The benefits of productivity improvements, once shared with workers, are now being disproportionately distributed to shareholders and corporate executives.

Q. Won't employers replace less-skilled workers with higher-skilled workers if they are forced to raise wages?

Research on the minimum wage suggests that living wage ordinances will not cause job loss among less-skilled workers. For example, a recent Economic Policy Institute study of the effects of the 1996-97 minimum wage increase found no evidence of job loss among teenagers and adult workers with less than a high-school education (two groups of workers that typically have lower skill levels) (Bernstein and Schmitt 1998).

There is also no evidence that firms that transition from a strategy of low pay/low-skills to a strategy of high-pay/high-skills have lowered employment opportunities for their low-skilled workers. However, the evidence does suggest that these employers typically make the transition by retaining, training, and motivating their existing workforce.

Q. Will earning a living wage result in a loss of benefits for families currently receiving government assistance?

It is true that many federal programs for the poor, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), do “phase out” as people earn more money. So a dollar of extra pay does not translate into a full dollar of extra income after lost benefits are calculated. But with a living wage, workers still end up with most of the higher pay, despite the poor design of federal aid programs. Consider the following scenario. An individual receives food stamps, EITC, and Section 8 housing. If she gets a raise, but the raise keeps her below 130% the federal poverty level, she will qualify for food stamps. However, even staying below poverty level, every \$100 she earns in a raise will result in a loss of \$24 in food stamps. This individual still will earn a raise of \$76. In regards to Section 8 housing, which is figured on 30% of a person’s income, for every \$100 increase, her rent will increase by \$20. Her net raise is now \$46. In addition, she might lose approximately \$20 of her EITC. The resulting net raise is \$26. After all of the deductions, she still experiences a net gain in income.

Q. Employers in a competitive market place must vie with each other for business. Won’t paying a living wage make an employer less competitive?

Using wages to be competitive promotes a “race to the bottom”, pulling down living standards not only for directly affected workers, but potentially for the community as a whole. This race to the bottom adds strain to communities, requiring public resources to offset costs of poverty wages and imposing greater demands on private charities.

Competing by lowering wages also promotes greater turnover and discourages employer investment in training and other productivity-enhancing measures. Greater turnover and the discouragement of employer investment in training can inhibit improvements in overall service quality.

Paying a living wage can improve the standards of workers and the communities in which they live and may have a beneficial impact on affected businesses and the business climate overall.

In the absence of living and minimum wage laws, firms can choose either the "low road" (low pay, low training, low motivation, high turnover, and high vacancies) or the "high road" (higher pay, more training, greater motivation, lower turnover, and fewer vacancies). Almost every industry includes profitable businesses that follow both paths.

High-road employers, who would rather have a stable workforce and produce a high-quality product, have to compete for contracts with low-road employers, who provide a poorer-quality product at a lower cost. Living wage ordinances encourage businesses to take the high road, leading to higher quality services for the public and a more highly trained workforce.

Opponents of living wages have provided no evidence that the transition from low-road to high-road employment will lower employment opportunities for less-skilled workers. The evidence suggests that employers typically make the transition by retaining, training, and motivating their existing workforces.

Q. Won't business pass the cost of paying a living wage on to consumers and the public?

No. In fact, it's the absence of living wage requirements that allow businesses to shift some of their employment costs to the public. In many ways you're paying for low wages, now, with your tax dollars. When workers work hard and are paid poverty-level wages, your tax dollars are subsidizing the corporations by paying for welfare, food stamps, and housing subsidies.

Three studies on existing living wage ordinances found early evidence that relatively little of the extra cost in labor had been passed on to consumers or the cities with whom they contract. The studies suggested that companies were absorbing the higher wages or finding ways to offset them (Uchitelle, 1999). In fact, higher wages may actually help firms reduce turnover and fill vacancies, and, according to some economists, can also lead to greater worker productivity by improving morale and overall job satisfaction. These benefits generate efficiency gains that allow firms to absorb the increase in labor costs (Card and Krueger, 1999).

It also is important to understand that wages are just one of many factors that make up the cost of an item. Factors such as manufacturing, transportation, equipment, rent, advertising, and business location also contribute to the cost of doing business.

Q. Won't living wages inevitably lead to higher taxes or inflation?

To date there is no evidence that living wage ordinances have led to higher taxes. Conversely, raising salaries to a living wage often benefits a community. Low-wage workers who receive a raise rely less on public assistance or private charity and their ability to meet their own needs – and therefore to purchase goods and services – can pump more money back into their communities. Further, when American workers aren't being paid enough to buy products, sooner or later the economy will go into a depression, hurting all of us.

Rising wages also don't always lead to inflation. An example of the non-inflationary relationship between wages and the cost of goods can be found in the 1996 survey report entitled, "Think Again: A Wage and Price Survey of Denver Area Fast Food Restaurants." This survey focused on four national fast food chains: Arby's, Burger King, MacDonald's and Taco Bell. All were major employers of entry level, low-wage workers. The conclusions of the study showed that higher prices did not necessarily accompany higher wages. For example, the lowest paid Arby's employees were found at a franchise charging the second highest price for a meal. Conversely, a Taco Bell store paying \$1.50 per hour above other restaurants for starting wages simultaneously had the lowest food prices.

Q. Won't a living wage policy chase away existing businesses and deter new investment?

Early fears that a living wage law would drive investment from a city have not materialized in Baltimore, the first city to adopt a living wage ordinance, back in 1994. An analysis of the fiscal and economic costs of Baltimore's living wage ordinance by the Preamble Center in 1996 found no evidence that local businesses or potential investors responded negatively to the ordinance.

For many businesses, their assets have value in a particular location and not outside of it. For example, restaurants, hotels, utilities, construction, universities, and many professional and personal services are very strongly place-bound (Schoenberger). If faced with a requirement to increase wages, it is likely that moving out of the city would be a last resort for such location-specific businesses. Further disincentives to moving to a new location are the numerous costs associated with relocation.

Some communities are concerned that higher wages may discourage new businesses from opening or expanding. It is true that wage levels are one factor in a business's decision as to where to locate. And if all else were equal, the wage level might very well be the determining factor. However, all else is never equal (Schoenberger). Access to markets and transportation systems, infrastructure, the education and skill level of the available workforce, and overall quality of life all vary city to city and exert influence over location decisions.

Economist Erica Schoenberger suggests that the real deterrent to urban investment is not high costs, but high levels of poverty:

Poverty, quite plainly, generates insecurity and difficulty for the rich and the poor alike. It severely limits the local market, which makes a city uninteresting to many kinds of business. It produces ill-prepared workers whose lives are easily disrupted by small catastrophes. If the car breaks down, if the kid gets sick, it suddenly becomes impossible to be a reliable worker. Poverty also generates poor health among workers, making them less reliable still and raising the cost of employing them. It creates a lack of physical security for workers, employers, and property. It produces also a meager tax base and poor physical infrastructure and public services. The costs of doing business could be subsidized to near zero in such a place and investment might still not be forthcoming.

So, rather than threatening the city's economic prospects, a living wage policy, by helping to raise workers out of poverty, becomes a central tool for economic development and a positive contributor to a city's investment climate (Schoenberger).

Q. Shouldn't we let the free market, not the government, determine wage levels?

What is often referred to as the "free" market often isn't free at all. Government plays a rule-setting role, seeking to promote market efficiency, while also containing the social costs stemming from a completely unfettered market. For example, the Federal Reserve Board tries to manage economic growth and control inflation by manipulating interest rates. In addition, businesses are often beneficiaries of government intervention. Federal, state, and local governments consistently provide billions of dollars in subsidies, tax breaks, and other forms of corporate welfare to businesses in the name of economic growth.

Given the degree to which many businesses already benefit from market interventions, it is inconsistent and even spurious for businesses to selectively argue that the market should be left to its own devices in the case of determining wage levels. Additionally, businesses that pay poverty wages indirectly rely on government assistance programs to make up the difference between these wages and what it costs their employees to live. Without the intervention of

government and private charities, paying poverty wages wouldn't be a sustainable business practice.

Many critics of the living wage argue that setting wage levels should be the responsibility of businesses alone. But in the United States, the government has long had a role in setting job quality standards that protect workers. Beginning in the 1930s, activists struggled to get federal and state governments to establish job quality standards to prevent abuses of workers. Many of these provisions are still in effect today, including minimum wage laws, overtime requirements, and prohibitions against child labor. More recently, activists advocated for laws such as occupational safety and health standards, family and medical leave.

The above Questions and Answers are excerpted from:

AFL-CIO Department of Public Policy

http://www.aflcio.org/yourjobeconomy/livingwage/upload/livingwage_1.pdf

Austin Living Wage Coalition

<http://www.main.org/alwc/myth.htm>

Economic Policy Institute

http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/issueguides_livingwage_livingwage

Responsible Wealth – a project of United for a Fair Economy

http://www.responsiblewealth.org/living_wage/qanda.html

Universal Living Wage

<http://www.universallivingwage.org/>

And include information from the following sources:

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Schoenberger, Erica, 1999. "The Living Wage in Baltimore: Impacts and Reflections," unpublished paper (Dept. of Geography and Environmental Engineering, The Johns Hopkins University).

Uchitelle, Louis. "Minimum Wages, City by City; As Local Laws Pass, More Businesses Complain," New York Times, November 11, 1999, p. C1.

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Living Wage Initiative

Sponsored by the Just Peace Institute and supported by the members of the Living Wage Coalition of Brazos Valley

Living Wage Initiative Objective

To succeed in convincing Texas A & M University to raise the starting wage for all full time workers to a living wage.

We support a living wage because we believe that hardworking, full-time workers

- Should not have to live in poverty.
- Deserve to earn wages that support self-sufficiency.
- Should not require government assistance.
- Can provide for their families and help the local economy through a decrease in health care assistance, food programs, housing and community service costs and an increase in buying power for the worker.

Living Wage Initiative: Guiding Principles

1. To engage in a successful initiative to raise wages, poverty-wage workers need a strong base of support that must come from the community.
2. Coalition-building can provide that base of support.
3. Issue education and awareness-building are the keys to bringing members into the coalition.
4. Poverty-wage workers need to be incorporated at the coalition-building phase by including organizations and faith communities of which they are members in the education process.
5. The vulnerable status of workers must be protected at all stages of the initiative, including community education.
6. Poverty-wage workers need to be incorporated into the Coalition management structure as soon as leaders can be identified.
7. Once a coalition has been formed and community education is well underway, the Coalition can begin to determine the best strategy for lobbying the TAMU administration and presenting the case for a living wage for all full time poverty-wage workers.
8. A living wage initiative can provide a catalyst for community organizing and coalition building around other economic justice and sustainability issues important to our community.

***Members of the Living Wage Coalition
(As of April 5, 2005)***

**Bryan/College Station Community
Organizations**

- American Civil Liberties Union - Brazos Valley Chapter
- NAACP - Brazos Valley Chapter
- Texas Democratic Women of Brazos Valley
- Brazos County Democrats
- Local Chapter League of United Latin American Citizens
- Central Labor Council of Brazos Valley
- Democratic Coffee Club
- Daniel Hernandez Law Firm
- Carver - Kemp Neighborhood Association
- Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Brazos Valley
- Friends Congregational Church (UCC)

Texas A&M Organizations

- Hispanic Professional Network
- Aggie Democrats
- Mexican American/Latin American Faculty Network
- Sociology Club
- Global Justice
- Faculty and Staff Committed to an Inclusive Campus

Coalition Management Structure

Chair: Cecelia Hawkins

Steering Committee: Nancy Bertsch, Florencia Choto, Jennifer Considine, Ernie Goetz, Ginny McDonnell, Carol Walther

Coalition Board: At least one representative from each coalition member organization plus the steering committee and interested individuals including Volunteer Advocates

Living Wage Initiative Contact Information

Living Wage Coalition Steering Committee

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Secretary

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Dr. Ginny McDonnell
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¹ Texas A&M University (2004, September 2). Texas A&M University Classified Personnel Pay Plan. Retrieved November 10, 2004, from: <http://hr.tamu.edu/classification/table1.asp>

² McDonnell, G. (2002). Where there is a will: There is a living wage. Unpublished manuscript. Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

³ Personal Communication (September 29, 2004). Lallah M. Howard, CPA, Assistant Vice President for Finance, Texas A&M University. [Note: Total income based on 2088 hours/year.]

⁴ United States Department of Health and Human Services (2004, February, 13). Annual Update of HHS Federal Poverty Guidelines. Retrieved October 22, 2004, from: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/04fedreg.htm>

⁵ National Low Income Housing Coalition. (2003). Out of reach 2003: America's housing wage climbs. Retrieved October 22, 2004, from: <http://www.nlihc.org/oor2003/data.php?getstate=on&getcounty=on&county%5B%5D=brazoscounty&state%5B%5D=TX>

⁶ Economic Policy Institute. (2004). Basic family budget calculator. Retrieved October 22, 2004, from <http://www.epinet.org/cgioutput.cfm?template=epiucalc.XaFMys&title=Basic%20Family%20Budget%20Calcalato> [Note: Data reported on the website are from 1999; they have been adjusted here for the change in the cost of living between 1999 and 2004 by multiplying by 1.14. See: <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>]

⁷ Consider, for example, the recent statements made by Chuck Sippial, TAMU Vice President of Administration regarding the custodial staff: "Without these guys we couldn't go to class or to work each day...They are among the lowest paid, but the most valuable because they build our reputation. It is their efforts that visitors see when they come to our campus."

Sledge, C. (2004, September 15). Custodial staff honored for work [Electronic Version]. The Battalion. Retrieved October 22, 2004, from: <http://www.thebatt.com/news/2004/09/15/News/Custodial.Staff.Honored.For.Work-719032.shtml>

⁸ Pollin, R., & Luce, S. (1998). The living wage: Building a fair economy. New York: The New Press.

⁹ Implementation of a living wage of 130% of the federal poverty level will permit A&M employees to cease their dependence on public assistance in the form of food stamps.

¹⁰ Annual wage calculated based upon 2088 hours/year, United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2004, February, 13). *Annual Update of HHS Federal Poverty Guidelines*. Retrieved October 22, 2004, from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/04fedreg.htm>

¹¹ Personal Communication (September 29, 2004). Lallah M. Howard, CPA, Assistant Vice President for Finance, Texas A&M University. [Note: Total income based on 2088 hours/year.]

¹² Sledge, C. (2004, September 15). Custodial staff honored for work [Electronic Version]. The Battalion. Retrieved October 22, 2004 from <http://www.thebatt.com/news/2004/09/15/News/Custodial.Staff.Honored.For.Work-719032.shtml>

¹³ McDonald, G. (2003). *Where there is a will: there is a living wage*. Unpublished manuscript. Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

¹⁴ The total University budget for FY05 is approximately \$984.1M. Personal Communication (November 10, 2004). Dan Parker, Associate Provost, Texas A&M University.

¹⁵ To calculate the equivalent monthly salary in 2005, the 2001 salary has been multiplied by the change in the cost of living between 2001 and 2005 based upon the Consumer Price Index. \$1266.46 in 2005 dollars is the equivalent of \$1160.32 in 2001 dollars. Further data available at <http://www.bls.gov/cpi/>

¹⁶ Personal Communication (September 19, 2004). Edith Rasell, M.D., Ph.D. Minister for Labor Relations and Community Economic Development, United Church of Christ.

¹⁷ McDonnell, G. (2002). Where there is a will: There is a living wage. Unpublished manuscript. Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

¹⁸ Starting wage data collected from University human resource department websites. Data pulled from published pay scales and/or current job advertisements. Sources include: http://www.ou.edu/ohr/forms/bands_hourly.html

- http://www.okstate.edu/osu_per/hr/paychart.htm
- <http://utdirect.utexas.edu/pnjd/index.WBX>
- <https://jobs.texastech.edu/applicants/jsp/shared/frameset/Frameset.jsp?time=1113574474969>
- <https://employment.unl.edu/applicants/jsp/shared/frameset/Frameset.jsp?time=1113574826785>
- <http://hr.unl.edu/classcom/sub/2005ossalary.pdf>
- <https://jobs.ku.edu/applicants/jsp/shared/frameset/Frameset.jsp?time=1113575250271>
- <http://www.k-state.edu/hr/vac.html#serv>
- <http://www.colorado.edu/humres/jobs/freqfilled.html?a=51>
- <https://www.missouri.edu/~hrswww/application/vacdetails.php?vac=1000677>
- <https://www.iastatejobs.com/applicants/jsp/shared/frameset/Frameset.jsp?time=1113577484478>
- <http://hr.tamu.edu/classification/payplan.asp>

¹⁹ Cost of Living Adjustments made using: Sperling's *BestPlaces*. (2005). Cost of Living Salary Calc. BLS Consumer Price Index. Available: <http://www.bestplaces.net/html>