



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
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LIVING WAGE IN LONGMONT
A Call to Action
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In its 2018 *Vision Statement*, Longmont City Council sees the city becoming “in 20 years the world’s greatest village . . . where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and feel they belong.”

The League of Women Voters of Boulder County believes that opportunities to “thrive and belong” depend upon individuals and families having **sufficient earned income** to support themselves and become actively engaged in shared community life. We believe that *alleviating poverty is the shared responsibility of government, employers, individuals and non-profit assistance organizations. All sectors should be involved in setting an adequate minimum wage or living wage.*

The *living wage* is related to the *Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS)*.¹ The SSS measures how much income a **family of a certain composition** in a **given place** needs to meet their basic needs adequately, without public or private assistance.²

Benefits for Longmont of a Living Wage

- City sales tax revenues increase as residents can afford more purchases.
- City expenditures for publicly funded assistance decrease.
- Need for publicly subsidized housing (‘affordable housing’) decreases.
- Family and individual stress decreases, improving mental health and reducing law enforcement needs.
- Local commerce expands.³
- City enjoys a more cohesive workforce—higher employee retention, less turnover, less costly training of new employees.
- Employees and their families are healthier.
- Employees’ children do better in school.⁴
- Workers can hold only one job (not several sub-living-wage jobs) and thus have more time to participate in school and sports events and local celebrations.
- Latino employees, who hold a large proportion of low-wage jobs, have time to participate in the social fabric, furthering Longmont’s goals of ethnic diversity and *inclusion*.

Recommendations

Colorado state law prohibits localities from setting a higher minimum wage than the state minimum wage, except for the city’s own employees.⁵ As is well-known, the cost of living in Boulder County is significantly higher than in other parts of the state such as the eastern plains, in the San Luis Valley or in the farming communities.

This year, the city of Longmont adjusted its *minimum wage* for full-time, benefited employees to meet the Self-Sufficiency Standard of \$15.87 per hour. The minimum wage remains low for part-time benefited employees (\$12.69 per hour) and even lower for

temporary, non-benefited employees (\$10.20 per hour, the Colorado state minimum wage).^{vii}

We recommend that the city insert a *labor practices clause* into contracts with local companies for ongoing work such as custodial and landscape services. It can stipulate a minimum hourly wage, percentage of contribution to benefits, and even predictable and sufficient hours of work. Such stipulations can enable families to have a more stable family life.

Wage increases must be high enough to avoid the *cliff effect*. A wage increase for individuals who participate in public support programs can lower the benefits so that their total income falls. A small wage increase that results in lowered income does not encourage self-sufficiency.

The success of the Longmont Housing Authority's RISE Program^{viii} shows that introducing flexibility into support programs, making accommodations for wage increases without dropping recipients from child care or housing assistance programs, can make an enormous difference in family incomes, helping them benefit from wage increases instead of being penalized.

We also call upon business owners, nonprofit agency directors, the Longmont Chamber of Commerce, the Latino Chamber, the Longmont Economic Development Corporation, and other leaders to participate *voluntarily* in achieving a living wage as the local minimum wage.

The LWVBC influences public policy through education and advocacy on positions developed through careful study and inquiry leading to decisions made through consensus. See lwwbc.org

^v In contrast to the U.S. government's Official Poverty Measure (or "poverty level") the *Self-Sufficiency Standard* is based on *all* major budget items of working adults, including housing, child care, food, health care, transportation, taxes, and miscellaneous costs - see <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/the-standard>

^{vi} In 2015 the SSS in Boulder County for a family with one adult and one pre-schooler was \$56,718 annually (\$26.86 hourly). See <http://cclponline.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Boulder.pdf>.

^{vii} According to the Boulder County *Trends Report 2017-2019*, 17 percent of Longmont's children's families in 2015 were below the poverty level, the highest percentage in Boulder County. Roxanne Bailin, a retired District Judge in Boulder County, noted the following in 2015: "As a former judge, I have seen first-hand the myriad negative effects of poverty: In Boulder County, the chances of reading at grade level by 3rd grade are only 55% if you grow up in poverty, but 90% if your parents make at least \$30,000 a year. At \$10.10 an hour, the most a parent can make is \$21,008 per year. At \$13.99 per hour, a parent can make \$29,099 per year, very close to the \$30,000 tipping point. This is dramatic data. . . . [F]or example, many poor children are truant because they must care for younger children, work to support the family, or skip school because their parents are preoccupied with earning enough money to feed their families. Unsupervised truant children who are not caring for siblings or working often associate with other truant children and turn to illegal activities and drug use. Prolonged truancy leads to dropping out of school. Failure to finish high school is directly correlated to drug use, criminal activity, teen pregnancy, and further poverty. This is just one example from my long experience."

^{viii} CRS § 8-6-101: "No unit of local government, whether by acting through its governing body or an initiative, a referendum, or any other process, shall enact any jurisdiction-wide laws with respect to minimum wages; except that a unit of local government may set minimum wages paid to its own employees."

^{vii} See the Attachment, "City of Longmont Wages in 2018."

^{viii} See <https://www.longmonthousing.org/rise-program>.