

the harvard living wage campaign

For more information, please, visit www.livingwagenow.com

"I mean, my kids don't really think they're poor. When we go to a soup kitchen, they think they're going to a restaurant." – Jane Mawson, Custodian, 40 years old.

◆ WHAT IS A LIVING WAGE?

The idea behind a living wage is that people who work in our community should be able to live decently and raise their families here. This requires a wage and benefits package that accounts for the area-specific cost of living, as well as the basic expenses involved in supporting a family.

The minimum wage does not begin to meet the needs of working people or families anywhere in the country: In fact, it puts a parent with one child below the federal poverty line. A living wage aims to correct this by establishing, at a local level, a more reasonable minimum wage. Like many municipal standards in place around the country, our living wage standard also combines this wage standard with benefits.

"I'm sixty-three now and I'm really busted. I literally have no money. I make \$9.40 an hour and I'm in debt... Working overtime is how I survive. Five years without a raise... At this point, and at this rate, I'll work forever. I'll never retire." – Gene Bartles, Security Guard

◆ WHAT DOES IT COST TO LIVE IN CAMBRIDGE?

Studies of the local cost of living, such as those conducted by the Economic Policy Institute and Wider Opportunities for Women, suggest a living wage standard of at least \$12 per hour plus benefits. Moreover, the National Low-Income Housing Commission estimates that a wage of over \$15 per hour is needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment in the Boston area. To our knowledge, no study of the local cost of living supports a wage less than \$10.68 per hour, the wage standard set by the Cambridge living wage ordinance in 1999.

"The money I'm making is not enough. I have to get another job to support my family. If they give me \$15 an hour here, it would be OK. I could survive. The reason I am doing two jobs is not because I want to be rich. Because this job is not enough for me to pay the bills."- Amis Verde, Custodian, 40 years old

◆ WHAT DOES HARVARD PAY NOW?

In the absence of a living wage policy, Harvard's wages vary tremendously. While Harvard's endowment fund managers are paid as much as \$16.7 million per year, an increasing number of campus workers—generally campus restaurant employees, custodians and guards—are paid wages that are grossly inadequate. For instance, according to data released by the university itself, the median wage for directly-hired janitors is now just \$9.55 per hour—an astonishing 10% cut in real wages compared to 1998. Moreover, the median wage for the guards who protect Harvard's invaluable art museums is now \$8.96 per hour, and some subcontracted dining hall workers earn barely above \$6.75 per hour, the state minimum wage. For a full-time worker taking no vacations, a \$10 hourly wage yields a yearly income of just \$20,000—making the worker poor enough to qualify for almost \$1,000 in food stamps. Because Harvard pays so little, hundreds of employees are forced to work two and even three jobs—as many as 80 or 90 hours per week—and still struggle to support their families.

"I get home from my second job around 11:30 PM. In bed around midnight. I'm up again before 4 AM so I can be back here in the morning." - Bob Davis, Custodian, 64 years old

◆ HOW MANY WORKERS ARE MAKING LESS THAN A LIVING WAGE?

According to data just released by the university, well over 1000 Harvard workers earn less than \$10.68 per hour, and well over 1400 earn less than \$12 per hour. These workers fall into three categories:

1. **Directly-hired, unionized "regular" employees.** As of March, 2001, Harvard paid 424 directly-hired "regular" employees less than \$10.68 per hour; in comparison, only 170 employees earned an inflation adjusted wage of less than \$10.68 per hour in 1994.
2. **Casual employees.** Casual employees work at Harvard part-time and on a temporary basis; although they are directly-hired, they are ineligible for union membership, typically receive no benefits, enjoy no job security, and

are often inadequately paid. As of March, 1999, approximately 650 casual employees earned less than \$10 per hour (then the Cambridge living wage standard).

3. **Subcontracted employees.** Harvard establishes contracts with nearly 9000 firms annually, and maintains ongoing relationships with roughly 180 firms. Like casual workers, subcontracted employees are vulnerable to numerous forms of exploitation. As of March 2001, 579 of these on-campus workers earned below \$10.68 per hour.

◆ **WHO'S WORKING THESE LOW-PAYING JOBS?**

The overwhelming majority of low paid, directly hired Harvard employees are people of color, primarily African-American and Latino, while the majority of higher paid clerical and administrative employees are white. Harvard's poverty wage policy smacks of institutional racism, because people of color are disproportionately affected by Harvard's poverty wages, while being disproportionately under-represented in the faculty and in the administration.

"You'll never see management contracted out...There's not a working foreman in the place that's a minority or a woman. There's only one person in middle management that's a minority." - Sasha Dupree, Facilities Maintenance

◆ **IF CAMBRIDGE IS SO EXPENSIVE, WHY DON'T THE WORKERS MOVE ELSEWHERE OR GET A DIFFERENT JOB CLOSER TO WHERE THEY LIVE?**

In fact, many workers at Harvard University do live elsewhere, in East Boston or Roxbury, but some live as far away as New Bedford or Fall River. In some cases, a Harvard worker will spend a total of 4 hours commuting to and from work each day, because it's impossible to afford to live any closer.

Best case scenario: a worker finds a better-paying job, or a job closer to home. The jobs at Harvard don't go away. Harvard will still hire janitors and restaurant workers and guards and pay them wages that leave them in poverty.

"My friend was asking me, 'You ever get the feeling you just don't belong here anymore?' Like it's just a whole new regime of people that have come in. So I'm moving too. Next month. I just can't afford Cambridge."

- Greg Lewis, Book Stockroom Employee, 50 Years Old

◆ **CAN HARVARD AFFORD TO PAY A LIVING WAGE?**

Yes. Last May, in the Arco Forum at the Kennedy School, Polly Price, Associate Vice President for Human Resources said, "The issue has never been about money. Harvard could do this...in a heartbeat." By very liberal estimates, it would cost Harvard just one-half of one percent of the university's annual budget. Looked at another way, it is less than one-half of one percent of the annual interest on Harvard's endowment. Looked at still another way, it's millions of dollars less than Harvard paid a single endowment fund manager in the year 2000.

"To pay us a living wage would not break the university, and it would also satisfy the philosophical and moral principles that they are constantly telling everybody that they stand for, and which they negate and turn into a lot of hypocrisy by the way they treat us." - David Hogan, Security Guard, 42 years old

◆ **IF HARVARD IMPLEMENTS A LIVING WAGE, WILL WORKERS BE FIRED?**

There is no reason to think so. To begin with, the jobs that underpaid workers perform on this campus are ones that need to be done: delivering mail, cooking, working in libraries, building, cleaning, and so on. Harvard can not fire these workers without seriously impairing its own ability to function. Unlike a fast food chain, which has substantial freedom to downsize and close individual branches, Harvard can not simply eliminate the Biology department, close down Adams house, or cut off the meal plan.

Moreover, as mentioned above, Harvard can easily bear the added costs of a living wage. Just as Harvard can choose to implement wage increases, it can simply choose not to fire workers in the process.

Finally, it should be noted that Harvard has in the past proven that it can dramatically increase wages without laying people off. Since its establishment in 1988, the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers has won a 77% increase in its members' wages. No one has been fired.

"Fifteen years ago they brought in the part timers...they try to put in two part timers instead of one full timer. So they don't have to get benefits." - Matt Lekas, Harvard Law School, Custodian, 51 years old

◆ **HOW CAN I LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED?**

Visit our website at www.livingwagelow.com to learn more about the campaign's history and current activities, read its detailed reports, and find out how to get involved. If you have questions or comments, please contact us at pslm@hcs.harvard.edu. The campaign meets on Mondays at 7:00 P.M. in Phillips Brooks House.