



RAISE THE WAGE OKLAHOMA

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

How to use this guide: Our coalition represents a diverse group of organizations, and no one knows how to message to your constituencies better than you do. The content contained in this guide should serve as a reference point and messaging north star – but please adjust it to reflect your own voice and that of your organization.

STATE QUESTION 832

State Question 832 would gradually increase Oklahoma’s minimum wage to \$15 over four years. Beginning with an increase to \$9.00 in 2025, followed by an increase of \$1.50 per year until it reaches \$15 in 2029. After 2029, the minimum wage would be indexed to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W)

SQ832 would also remove prior exemptions to increases in the minimum wage for:

- Any individual employed on a farm
- Any individual employed in domestic service in or about a private home
- Any newspaper vendor or carrier
- Any individual employed as a part-time employee not on permanent status
- Any individual who is less than eighteen years of age and is not a high school graduate or a graduate of a vocational training program, and any individual who is less than twenty-two years of age and who is a student regularly enrolled in a high school, college, university, or vocational training program.
- Any individual employed in a feedstore operated primarily for the benefit and use of farmers and ranchers



POSITIVE MESSAGING ARCHITECTURE

We have two current messaging tracks on this campaign: 1) our “positive” message, which is persuasive for nearly all audiences; 2) our “counter-arguments” message, which rebuts false claims made by the opposition.

Emphasize cost of living increases: The cost of groceries, gas, and housing keep skyrocketing – while thousands of Oklahomans work full-time and earn less than \$15,100 a year on minimum wage.

Highlight the impact of rising costs on Oklahoma families: Too many Oklahoma parents work – often at more than one job – but struggle to put food on the table when they earn \$290 a week. Raising the minimum wage lets people feed their families and pay rent. Our communities are stronger when people can care for their families.

Highlight community-focused low-wage workers: It’s ridiculous that home healthcare workers and childcare workers are among the lowest-paid people in Oklahoma – averaging just \$10.75 an hour. With the cost of groceries and gas skyrocketing, this policy is needed to ensure that people entrusted with our loved ones can make a living.

Stress that the wage increases are gradual but will provide immediate relief to Oklahomans: Gradually raising the minimum wage over the next four years is a win-win for businesses and workers. It puts more money in workers' pockets, while the phase-in allows businesses time to adjust. When workers earn more, they spend it in their communities, helping small businesses and strengthening the economy.

Use a call to action that underscores the impact on working families: Vote yes to help hard-working Oklahomans put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. People who work for a living should be able to earn a living.



COUNTER-ARGUMENTS:

It's essential to lead with positive messaging, but don't wait to be attacked to offer the counter-arguments below. Most Oklahoma voters believe a wage increase will slightly hurt OK businesses. Still, there is an overwhelming sense that it will help working families and boost the economy. Proactively pairing the counter-arguments with our positive messaging gives voters informed permission to support raising the wage.

Government-mandated wage increases drive up inflation and hurt Oklahoma's economy: According to a study¹ by the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, localities that have gradually increased wages show a minimal effect on inflation while giving a meaningful boost to workers' earnings. Nationally, the recent inflation rate is about 100x more than the projected increase caused by raising the minimum wage.² Inflation quickly cuts purchasing power and living standards, making it more important, not less, to raise wages to keep up with costs.

Raising the minimum wage will harm family-owned businesses: Raising wages at lower-income levels of the economy boosts consumer spending while reducing employee turnover, saving small businesses the time and costs of constant employee recruitment. Real-world studies show that some businesses may modestly increase costs to consumers, but these increases are not typically enough to drive consumers away.³

¹ MacDonald, Daniel and Eric Nilsson. 2016. "The Effects of Increasing the Minimum Wage on Prices: Analyzing the Incidence of Policy Design and Context." Upjohn Institute Working Paper 16-260. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. <https://doi.org/10.17848/wp16-260>

² Josh Bivens. (2022) "Inflation, minimum wages, and profits" Economic Policy Institute Working Economics Blog <https://www.epi.org/blog/inflation-minimum-wages-and-profits-protecting-low-wage-workers-from-inflation-mean-s-raising-the-minimum-wage/>

³ Jesse Wursten and Michael Reich. (2023). "Small Businesses and the Minimum Wage". IRLE Working Paper No. 102-23. <https://irle.berkeley.edu/publications/working-papers/small-businesses-and-the-minimum-wage>



Due to the inflation crisis, federal government-mandated automatic wage adjustments could raise Oklahoma’s minimum wage to \$85 an hour within the next five years:

During peak inflation in 2022, the average cost of living increase to the minimum wage among other states based on the CPI was 50 cents or about 4%. Overall increases are modest, averaging \$0.22 per year over the last decade.⁴⁵ At that rate, It would take more than 100 years to reach \$85 per hour.

HELPFUL ARTICLES AND CASE STUDIES⁶

[IRLE Working Paper on Small Businesses and the Minimum Wage](#)

- **Wage Increases Without Job Loss:** The study finds that minimum wages increase pay in low-wage industries, especially in small businesses, without leading to a decline in employment rates; this challenges the common belief that higher minimum wages harm small businesses by demonstrating that pay increases do not result in job losses.
- **Impact on Different Business Sizes:** The study specifically examines the effect of higher minimum wages on small, low-wage businesses, including restaurants, grocery and retail stores, and childcare operations. It finds that the impact of minimum wage increases is not significantly different across various business sizes.
- **Benefits Beyond Wages:** The study notes that higher wages can make recruiting and retaining workers easier, reducing turnover rates. This reduction in turnover can benefit small businesses, as it leads to lower costs associated with recruiting and training new employees.
- **Price Increases and Consumer Behavior:** In some cases, small businesses, like restaurants, may pass on the higher costs to consumers through small price increases. However, these increases are typically not enough to drive consumers away, meaning that small businesses can absorb the cost of higher wages without losing customers or profits.

⁴ <https://www.ncsl.org/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wages>

⁵ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/minimum-wage/history>

⁶ Please note this will be updated with the Oklahoma specific data in early 2024.



- **Boost to Local Economies:** Raising wages at the bottom of the economy can boost consumption, supporting local economies' growth; this, in turn, can have a positive effect on small businesses operating within these localities.

[CNBC Article Detailing Decline In Earning Power Due To Inflation](#)

- The Federal Minimum Wage has stayed the same since 2009
- During the height of inflation in 2022, a worker earning minimum wage made 27.4% less than they would have in July 2009, adjusted for inflation.
- In 2022, the value of Oklahoma's minimum wage was down to the lowest level in 66 years.

[EPI Study Shows Minimum Wage Increases Have Trivial Effects On Inflation](#)

- Using a national example, the Raise the Wage Act, would raise the minimum wage to \$15 in five steps by 2027 and would be indexed to growth in median wages thereafter. If every penny of this higher minimum wage fed directly into higher prices—that is, none of it was financed by higher productivity or lower profits—the move to \$15 would create a one-time step-increase in the overall price level of less than 0.5%. Spread over five years, this implies an average boost to inflation of less than 0.1% per year, after which it would fade to near zero.