



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Gov. Wolf Takes Action to Protect Workers, Calls on Legislature to Improve Wages and Paid Sick Leave

Pittsburgh, PA – Continuing his commitment to hardworking Pennsylvanians, Governor Tom Wolf unveiled his agenda for workers today that will create safer workplaces, guarantee paid leave and increase worker pay, among other worker-centered improvements. The governor [signed an executive order](#) this morning and called on the General Assembly to finally pass legislation that supports workers.

“With our economy on the comeback, there are so many job openings that people can select the option that is best for their family. This is a critical moment for Pennsylvania workers, and it’s time we stop asking why there is a labor shortage and start asking how we can make jobs better,” said Gov. Wolf. “With Pennsylvanians renowned for our work ethic, this is an opportunity to improve jobs in the state, which will attract and retain hardworking people to live here and bring new industries to the commonwealth that want a talented, skilled and dedicated workforce.

“I’m taking executive action and calling for legislative action to create safer workplaces, promote higher wages and guarantee paid leave for workers. These three necessary changes will help workers and transform the nature of work in Pennsylvania.”

The governor was joined at a news conference in Pittsburgh by Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) Secretary Jennifer Berrier, Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Secretary Dennis Davin, Senate Democratic Leader Jay Costa, Rep. Jessica Benham and other legislators, workers and labor leaders.

“After COVID-19 exposed our workforce to a new set of dangers, it’s all the more important that we update statewide worker protections,” said Sen. Costa. “In so many industries, they were on the frontlines of COVID exposure without the equipment they needed to keep themselves safe, or the time off to heal if they got sick, let alone paid time off to care for sick loved ones. I’m here today in lockstep with the Governor’s commitment to this issue so that our workforce can thrive here in the commonwealth.”

“Over the past year and a half, we have seen just how essential all workers are in PA: from manufacturing and the supply chain, to teachers, to grocery store workers,” said Rep. Benham. “And while these workers support all of us – we must support them through legislation that raises the minimum wage, provides paid sick leave, and assures worker protections in both the public and private sectors.”

Safer Workplaces

Every worker deserves a safe and healthy workplace that follows the labor laws and protects the well-being of employees. The governor is directing L&I and the Office of Administration to study the feasibility of implementing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards in offices under the governor’s jurisdiction. State agencies will also ensure those receiving state grants and contracts protect their employees by following labor laws and understand the consequences of not complying.

The governor is also calling on the legislature to extend OSHA safety rules to all public employees -- safeguards the nation’s private sector and federal employees have benefitted from for 50 years. S.B. 310, sponsored by Sen. Tina Tartaglione, and H.B. 1976, sponsored by Rep. Pat Harkins, would ensure public employees know their safety is a priority.

“We are in a national conversation about the value of work and the dignity of individuals whose labor is the engine of our economy,” said Sec. Berrier. “Governor Wolf’s action today meets this moment by centering the needs of Pennsylvania workers so they can support their families and build communities where all work is valuable. The time to take meaningful action that supports workers and promotes economic prosperity is now.”

Paid Sick Leave

The governor is directing DCED to verify a business receiving an offer of assistance provides its workers paid sick leave and pays no less than the minimum wage for state employees before making a financial incentive offer. The \$13.50 minimum wage for state employees and contractors will reach \$15 on July 1, 2024, under an [executive order the governor signed in 2018](#).

“This executive order provides the wages, benefits and protections that workers deserve while giving companies the edge they need to attract employees in today’s pandemic business landscape,” said Sec. Davin. “Investing only in businesses that embody the core values of Pennsylvania’s economy, including paid sick leave and minimum wage requirements, means we will also enhance the well-being of our workforce and our economy.”

The governor is also urging the legislature to pass S.B. 13, sponsored by Sen. Vince Hughes, and H.B. 1035, sponsored by Rep. Mike Zabel, which would provide paid sick leave to workers in Pennsylvania. An estimated 400,000 Pennsylvania workers lack paid sick leave, which forces them to work when sick, risking their health and those around them. Providing paid sick leave would improve public health and prevent more people from getting sick, a protection that is beneficial to both workers and their employers.

Increase Worker Pay

For seven years, Governor Wolf has proposed a minimum wage increase that would boost the paychecks of many workers, create more customers for local businesses and make the economy stronger for everyone. Despite [strong public support](#), [evidence workers keep their jobs](#) and the opportunity to strengthen financial stability for women and people of color, the Republican legislature has failed to act, leaving Pennsylvania behind all of our neighboring states with a minimum wage of just \$7.25. Since the last time the minimum wage was increased, its purchasing power has dropped by nearly 17 percent, and the minimum wage has lost nearly 31 percent of its value compared to 50 years ago.

In addition to executive action on minimum pay for businesses receiving DCED offers, the governor called on the General Assembly to pass S.B. 12, sponsored by Sen. Tina Tartaglione, or H.B. 345, sponsored by Rep. Patty Kim, to raise Pennsylvania's minimum wage to \$12 an hour with a path to \$15 and remove local preemption.

Eight states are on a path to \$15, including red states, and President Joe Biden is raising the federal minimum wage for contractors to \$15. Overall, 29 other states, including every state that borders Pennsylvania, has a higher minimum wage.

The governor directed L&I to pursue regulatory changes so workers are fairly paid for their work time spent on activities such as security screenings and putting on equipment required for their job. L&I is also pursuing regulations so workers whose wages depend on tips receive the full amount of their tips and that there is better clarity around tipping processes and definitions.

Other Worker-Supporting Actions

The governor also announced that L&I will make publicly available a list of bad actors that violate labor laws, misclassify their workers, owe unemployment compensation back taxes or fail to carry requisite workers' compensation insurance.

While the governor is using his executive authority to help workers, many bills to protect and invest in workers are languishing in the General Assembly. Republican legislative leaders should immediately take action to pass equal pay for women, family and medical leave, help for seasonal farm workers, fair hiring practices and to stop misclassification of workers.

Help for Out-of-Work Pennsylvanians

Governor Wolf is also urging the General Assembly to take action to help out-of-work Pennsylvanians, many of whom face hardship because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The governor supports Rep. Gerald Mullery's H.B. 549, which amends the Unemployment Compensation Law to streamline the process for eligible Pennsylvania workers to access the benefit to which they are entitled. The bill also includes provisions to strengthen Pennsylvania's unemployment compensation safety net to ensure that benefits are available to workers during future times of high unemployment and economic downturn.

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