



STATE OF ILLINOIS
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LIVING WAGE ORDINANCE LETTER TO THE EDITOR
By Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn

There's a principle as old as the Bible: A decent day's pay for a hard day's work.

In America in 2006, we still believe in that simple principle. That's why I support the proposed Chicago ordinance which would require big box retailers to offer all their employees a living wage and decent benefits.

Under the ordinance, any giant store – defined as at least 90,000 square feet - - owned by a retailer with total annual sales of at least \$1 billion would have to pay its workers at least \$9.25 an hour, plus \$1.50 an hour in benefits, starting next year. After that, the pay rate would increase slightly each year, to \$10 an hour plus \$3 an hour in benefits by 2010.

This issue boils down to economic and social justice. If a company can afford to pay its CEO more than \$15 million a year, it can afford to pay a living wage to the hard-working people on the front lines who make that company's economic success possible.

In America, we believe that the best way to fight poverty is a job that pays decent wages and has decent benefits. There's something wrong when men and women who work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, can't earn enough money to escape poverty.

Earlier this year, the Greater Chicago Food Depository reported that 39% of the families it helps to feed include at least one working adult. Working people should earn a wage that allows them to feed themselves and their children.

There are some who claim that the Chicago Living Wage ordinance might keep big box retailers from building new stores in the city. However, the City of Chicago has offered these big box retailers tens of millions of dollars in tax-increment financing -- subsidies that are provided through property tax revenues. Those subsidies give giant retailers a real incentive to open new stores in Chicago. It's only fair that the City of Chicago expects these big corporations to repay some of that investment by offering their workers a living wage.

If we want to preserve the middle class in our country, states and municipalities have to take action to make sure all workers receive a living wage and decent benefits. I hope Chicago's City Council will pass this ordinance Wednesday and make a real difference in the lives of hard-working men and women and their families.

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