



Establishing a Living Wage in Rural North Carolina

“A job should lift you out of poverty, not keep you in it.”¹

Women in rural NC face economic challenges that make it difficult for them to adequately provide for themselves & their families, damaging not only the economic health of our rural communities, but the economic health of our state. Establishing a living wage will improve the lives and health of women and their families.

What is a ‘living wage’?

- A living wage is defined as “the minimum hourly wage necessary for a worker or family to achieve a basic standard of living without public or private assistance.”²
- Living wage differs from minimum wage, a set wage that doesn’t vary with family size, composition, region, and expenses.

The Costs of Poverty: Health and Hope

- According to surveys distributed randomly to a sample of women in a rural four-county area in NC, economy-related job loss was cited as the most pressing issue in the community. The cost of health care and prescriptions was also frequently cited, alone and within the context of poverty and job loss.

Income Disparities in NC

- In 2000, the Per Capita Income for a person living in Sampson County was \$14,967. In Orange County, just a few counties to the west, the Per Capita Income was \$24, 873. The Child Poverty rate for Sampson County was 21.5% vs. 9% in Orange County.³

Living Wage, Minimum Wage, and Poverty Wage by Hour in Duplin and Sampson Counties:

Imagine the difficulty of supporting a child on a minimum wage that doesn’t even adequately provide for a single adult. Establishing a living wage could reduce poverty and enable more people in our rural communities to afford preventive health care. Nearly half, 45.1%, of North Carolina’s families cannot afford their basic needs.⁴

	One Adult	One Adult, One Child
Living Wage (per hour)		
Duplin Co.	\$7.38	\$12.86
Sampson Co.	\$7.39	\$12.86
Minimum Wage (per hour)		
Duplin Co.	\$6.15	\$6.15
Sampson Co.	\$6.15	\$6.15
Poverty Wage (per hour)		
Duplin Co.	\$4.73	\$6.38
Sampson Co.	\$4.73	\$6.38

Source: Living Wage Calculator (<http://www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu/>)
 Figures based on full-time employment, 2080 hours per year

Community Members Speak Out On Loss of Jobs and Poverty:

“In Duplin Co., you either have to be a nurse or drive a truck to make a reasonably good income. Not all people are directed to these careers. I honestly believe we need more readily available jobs in our area”.

“...Depression is hitting everyone because they cannot afford what they’ve been having. No jobs, no pay increase, but everything keeps going up. Yes, everything was better years ago”.

“I think that there are a significant number of folks who have just given up. They don’t know how to get out and there are very few choices.”⁵

Income disparity in the U.S. is greater than in any other major industrialized country in the world. In North Carolina, close to 450,000 families with children do not earn a living income. Half of the state's women and the majority of children, African-Americans and Latinos, live in homes where basic expenses go unpaid.⁶

What Needs to be Done?

Implementing a living wage ordinance or policy in rural NC Counties like Sampson and Duplin Counties would be the first step toward eliminating poverty and ensuring that all citizens who work full time can afford their basic needs.

- Living wage ordinances can be tailored to best meet the needs of specific communities, taking into account local job-makeup, economy, and the amount of income necessary in a given community for a suitable living wage.
- A committee should be formed to evaluate and analyze the needs of rural NC communities and create a customized plan for improving rural economies.

Examples of successfully implemented living wage ordinances/policies in other areas include:

- Requiring that private businesses benefiting from public funding pay employees an adequate living wage.
- Requiring that service contractors pay a suitable wage to employees; in Durham, NC a minimum hourly rate of \$7.55 per hour is required for city employees.
- Orange County, NC does not have a living wage ordinance, but has implemented a living wage policy for County level workers that promote a living wage.
- A successful campaign in Asheville/ Buncombe County encompasses several areas by using tax dollars to pay city and city contracted employees a suitable wage for the area, requiring businesses that receive benefits from the city to pay a living wage, and promoting health and general welfare of the community.⁷



A Shipping Plant in Rural NC

- ¹ Holly Sklar and Paul Sherry
- ² Jason R. Jenkins. "A Living Wage for North Carolina", 2006. <http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources/downloads/Living%20Wage%20for%20NC%20Report-Final.pdf>
- ³ North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc., Rural Data Bank.
- ⁴ John Quinterno and Elizabeth Jordan, *Falling Jobs, Falling Wages: The 2005 North Carolina Living Income Standard*. (NC Budget & Tax Center of the NC Justice Center: December 2005), 3. Accessed through: <http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources>
- ⁵ Benedict, Salli et al. Report from the CDC: "Seeds of HOPE: A Model for Addressing Social and Economic Determinants of Health in a Women's Obesity Prevention Project in Two Rural Communities". *Journal of Women's Health*: Volume 16, Number 8, 2007: 1117-1124.
- ⁶ John Quinterno and Elizabeth Jordan, *Falling Jobs, Falling Wages: The 2005 North Carolina Living Income Standard*. (NC Budget & Tax Center of the NC Justice Center: December 2005), 3. Accessed through: <http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources>
- ⁷ Jason R. Jenkins. "A Living Wage for North Carolina", 2006. <http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org/resources/downloads/Living%20Wage%20for%20NC%20Report-Final.pdf>

