

# South Bend Tribune

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## Viewpoint: Is the \$15 minimum wage too high for Indiana?

**Joseph Carbone** South Bend Tribune

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Despite the fact that a growing number of states and cities around the country are enacting laws to raise their minimum wage over the next few years to \$15 an hour, we still hear that may be too high for Indiana. Some wonder about the impact on the economy. Some ask whether that wage is too high for unskilled work. The answers, in short, are that raising the minimum wages would boost our state's economy and that it's ridiculous today that hundreds of thousands of Indiana workers in skilled, full-time jobs are being paid under \$15 an hour.

But before we get to those issues, let's ask a basic question: How much does it take to cover the basics of life in our state? According to MIT's living wage calculator, a single adult supporting one child would need to earn \$20.70 to cover the basic costs of living in the Indianapolis metro region. In Evansville, it would be \$20.40. That's just to cover the basics: food, housing, transportation, medical, child care and things like clothing and household supplies. So getting to a \$15 minimum wage over the next six years — which is the path California is on — is not exactly an ambitious goal.

But today, millions of Indiana's working families don't make even that basic wage, and that includes people who do a wide variety of work, including jobs that take substantial training and skills. Paramedics, judicial law clerks, nursing assistants, preschool teachers, etchers and engravers are among the 207 official Department of Labor job classifications that had an average wage less than \$15 in Indiana in 2015. And since this is based on averages, wages for many people in these job classifications are much less.

It's not surprising then that workers who get paid low wages are not the typical teenager; that may have been the case many years ago. A study of who in Indiana would earn more from raising the minimum wage to just \$12 found that 89 percent were older than 20, including 258,000 parents of 433,000 children. The working people who would get a raise are diverse racially also: Seventy-six percent are white, 11 percent are black and 11 percent are Latino.

And all those people getting raises boosts the economy. Economists have known for years that raising the minimum wage doesn't cost jobs. Now much more detailed calculations by economists at the University of California are finding that the increased consumer spending from raising the minimum wage over time to \$15 is likely to actually add jobs to local economies.

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The research shows that the economic boost from spending by workers who get raises over a few years outweighs any negative impact of slightly higher prices. That is if there are price hikes. Evidence just in from Seattle, which two years ago voted to gradually raise the minimum wage to \$15, found little or no evidence of price increases in Seattle relative to other areas. The study was done by researchers at the University of Washington.

We should value all working people enough to have a minimum wage that is high enough for a full-time worker to care for and support their families. That's fair and it's smart — it will create jobs on Main Streets throughout our state and help our communities to thrive.

**Joseph Carbone is executive director of St. Joseph Valley Project Jobs with Justice.**