

# Melissa Sargent: Raising up Wisconsin

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Here in Wisconsin, we believe in taking care of each other. We believe that putting in an honest day's work means you earn an honest day's pay. We believe that when we work hard and play by the rules, we should all have a fighting chance, and that we each do better when we all do better. We believe our economy should work for all of us, not just the top one-percent. And we know that higher wages create a better and fairer society for us all.

Yet, in Wisconsin, our state's minimum wage has stayed stagnant at \$7.25/hour since 2008 when there was a \$0.75 raise. \$7.25 wasn't enough to support a family in 2008, and it certainly isn't enough now. While the federal minimum wage has not increased since 2009, the cost of living in Wisconsin has only continued to rise with exuberant housing, childcare, and healthcare costs, among many others daily necessities and expenses. At \$7.25 per hour no individual can sustainably afford to live. For example:

- *Housing:* In Dane County, the cost for comfortably affording a two bedroom apartment requires making [\\$21.02/hour](#), or nearly 3x the current minimum wage. Statewide, this number is still a staggering average of [\\$16.77/hour](#).
- *Childcare:* Wisconsin remains ranked in the [top 15 states](#) for most expensive infant and child care. [In Wisconsin](#), the average yearly price for parents with one infant in center-based care is \$12,552—that's over \$1,000 every month (33 hours/week of work at a minimum wage of \$7.25/hour). The average yearly price for parents with two children in center-based care is \$22,733 (60 hours/week of work at a minimum wage of \$7.25/hour).

Imagine, despite working over 40-hours a week and oftentimes working two or three jobs to make ends meet, being unable to provide basic necessities for your family. Imagine, despite working in a profession that you find fulfilling and that benefits others, being told that you do not deserve to make enough money to survive on.

Imagine having to live pay check-to-pay check, and not being able to save for your future or your dreams. For far too many people here in Wisconsin, and perhaps for many of you reading this, these scenarios are a stark reality.

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Minimum wage workers in Wisconsin – from childcare and healthcare employees to food industry and stadium workers – are the backbone of our society. Without their contributions we would not be able to take our children to daycare, ensure our families have quality healthcare, eat at our favorite restaurants, or attend entertaining events in our community, among so many other examples. These individuals provide critical services to our state, and they deserve just compensation so that when they go home to their families they can provide for them.

Wisconsinites are working tirelessly to be able to put food on the table, but our outdated minimum wage system does nothing but hold them back from obtaining true financial security. Our state needs fair wages to give working families a chance to get ahead, to create a fairer society for all of us, and to recognize and support the dignity of workers. As a state we can afford to give working families a chance to succeed, and it's the right thing to do. It is time for Wisconsin to value our workers, support families, and take meaningful action to raise up our state.

The people of Wisconsin have said loud and clear that we need real reform that lifts up workers. That is why I am proud to introduce legislation to increase Wisconsin's minimum wage to \$15 per hour, and to tie the minimum wage to inflation. This legislation addresses the systematic injustice of unfair compensation, by creating a livable wage for workers in Wisconsin and ensuring that wages do not fall behind continued inflation. As a state we must give Wisconsin families a chance to get ahead, and addressing wage inequity is a vital step to do just that.

Wisconsinites deserve comprehensive reform that puts working people first. Increasing the minimum wage in our state will raise up workers and raise up Wisconsin.

*-Sargent, D-Madison, represents 48th Assembly District.*