



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog
www.dcfpi.org

February 24, 2015

Education and Enforcement Are Key to Making Sure Workers Benefit from Minimum Wage and Other Changes

By Ed Lazere

The District's leaders have adopted a number of new benefits and protections for people who work in the city, and now it is important to make sure they are fully implemented and enforced.

The city's minimum wage will rise to \$11.50 an hour in 2016, and all workers in the city earn paid sick leave starting with their first day on the job. Legislation adopted in 2014 prohibits employers from asking about an applicant's criminal record until a job offer has been made. Pregnant workers have the right to reasonable accommodations and are guarded against discrimination. Unemployed residents are now protected against job discrimination.



Source: www.learnthat.com

These new benefits and protections are only meaningful, however, if both employers and workers are aware of them, and if the District makes sure they are enforced. The city should take vigorous steps to inform workers and businesses of these new rights and benefits, and it will need adequate staff to enforce them, including responding to instances when employers fail to comply. The DC Fiscal Policy Institute and others recommend additional resources be provided in the following ways:

- **Public Education:** As little as \$300,000 would support meaningful dissemination of information on the minimum wage, earned sick and safe leave, and wage theft changes.
- **Ensuring All Workers Get the Minimum Wage and Paid Sick Days:** The office that receives and investigates claims from workers when employers do not follow these laws – the Office of Wage Hour within the Department of Employment Services – needs additional staff. In addition, the city uses administrative law judges to adjudicate claims that are found to be credible, and the city could use more.
- **Protecting Workers against Job Discrimination:** The Department of Employment Services and the DC Office of Human Rights would be better able to address discrimination against pregnant workers and jobseekers who are unemployed if they had additional staff.