

IMPROVE WAGES AND SUPPORT FOR WORKING FAMILIES

MAKING THE FUTURE BRIGHTER FOR WORKING FAMILIES



BIG SKY
Brighter Future

Charting the course for a better Montana.

Frontline workers deserve our thanks and the ability to reach financial security. To improve job quality and make it easier for families to make ends meet, Montana should:

- Raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2026;
- Protect workers through fair scheduling laws; and
- Guarantee workers can earn at least five paid sick days per year.



“It’s hard to plan for the future, or even child care, when I don’t know my schedule week to week or even if I will be able to afford rent.”
Kendra, Glendive

HOW WE GOT HERE

Montanans work hard but are paid some of the lowest wages in the country, with one in five working families with children living at or near poverty level incomes. Many working families struggle to cover the costs of basic necessities, such as rent, child care, and food. They are also unable to save, putting them at risk of slipping deeper into poverty with just one major car repair or medical emergency. In addition to earning low wages, many Montana workers face unpredictable work schedules, which can change week to week and result in fluctuating paychecks that put many families at risk of financial insecurity. A long history of discrimination and a broken system has resulted in exacerbating this problem for Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as they are more likely to work in low-paying jobs often without reliable schedules or the ability to accrue a single sick day. These types of business practices put our collective health at risk and make it harder for families to reach their full potential. Families work hard every day, but low wages, lack of paid sick days, and unpredictable work schedules leave them to struggle daily to make ends meet.

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ON THE HORIZON

1

Raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2026. Montana's current minimum wage provides an inflationary adjustment; however, the adjustment has not kept pace with the cost of living. A full-time worker making minimum wage will earn just \$18,000 in 2020, far from what a family needs to survive. Similar to other states, Montana can set a tiered increase to the minimum wage over several years, giving businesses time to adjust. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour will provide approximately 160,000 low-wage workers (nearly two-thirds of whom are women) with additional support to cover rising costs of housing, child care, and other necessities.

2

Protect workers through fair scheduling laws. Today, more and more low-wage workers are facing unpredictable work schedules. Work schedule challenges can include volatile or limited hours, frequent changes in shift schedules, mandatory overtime with little notice, and reduced hours in response to slowdowns at work. These types of work scheduling practices make it even harder for parents to secure affordable, quality child care. Montana should enact laws to require employers to provide advance notice of scheduling, pay a minimum number of hours when the employee is sent home early, and allow workers to request schedule changes without fear of retaliation.

3

Guarantee workers can earn at least five paid sick days per year. Currently, Montana workers are not guaranteed a single paid sick day. Those working at low incomes are less likely to have access to sick days, and going just 3.5 days without wages can cost the same as a family's entire monthly budget for groceries. A statewide policy on paid sick days would ensure that workers could earn a minimum number of sick days per year to access their wages during a short-term illness or injury.



ABOUT BIG SKY BRIGHTER FUTURE

Big Sky Brighter Future is charting a clear course to rebuild our state. This concrete plan for lawmakers has specific proposals to help families, workers, children, and communities, and creates a tax code that works for everyone. Montana cannot go back to the time when families faced barriers to build their best future. We can move our state forward and make it one where we can all live, work, and enjoy all Big Sky Country has to offer. There's a better Montana on the horizon, and this is how we get there.