

Campaign to put paid leave, \$15 minimum wage on 2018 ballot launches in New Bedford

By The Standard-Times

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NEW BEDFORD — Local members of the Raise Up Massachusetts coalition gathered Wednesday evening at Bristol Community College to launch a signature gathering campaign to put two questions on the November 2018 ballot: paid family medical leave and an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2022.

Dozens of supporters, including members of Coalition for Social Justice, United Interfaith Action, 1199 SEIU, Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen, Fall River Educators' Association, Marching Forward and Mass Senior Action Council and Indivisible Plymouth pledged to collect signatures from voters, according to a news release.

Petition forms for the two ballot questions must be signed by supporters by Dec. 6. Raise Up Massachusetts hopes to collect at least 200,000 signatures, organizers said. After signatures are collected, the Legislature has until the end of June 2018 to act before the questions go to the ballot.

Paid Family and Medical Leave: The ballot question would create a Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program for workers, providing up to 16 weeks of job-protected paid leave to care for a seriously ill or injured family member, to care for a new child, or to meet family needs arising from a family member's active duty military service (family leave); and up to 26 weeks of job-protected paid leave to recover from a worker's own serious illness or injury (medical leave), or to care for a seriously ill or injured service member.

The question prohibits employer retaliation against workers who take time off under these conditions, and workers taking paid leave would receive insurance benefits equal to 90 percent of their average weekly wages, up to a maximum weekly benefit of \$1,000. Benefits would be funded through employer

contributions to the new Family and Medical Leave Trust Fund (0.63 percent of weekly wages), and employers could require employees to contribute up to 50 percent of the trust fund contributions, according to Raise Up Massachusetts.

\$15 Minimum Wage: The ballot question would raise the minimum wage, currently \$11 an hour, by \$1 each year over four years until it is \$15 an hour in 2022. The minimum wage would then be adjusted each year to rise at the same rate as the cost of living, according to Raise Up Massachusetts. The question would also raise the minimum wage for tipped employees, currently \$3.75 an hour, over four years until it is 60% of the full minimum wage, or \$9 an hour, in 2022. It would then rise at the same rate as the cost of living, along with the full minimum wage.

Learn more at raiseupma.org.

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