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Boost urged in minimum wage

State senator proposes level reaches \$7.15 per hour by January 2007

By [Mandy Zatynski](#)

Dayton Daily News

COLUMBUS | A state senator repeatedly called Ohio's minimum wage "unconscionable" on Wednesday as she urged lawmakers to support her proposal to increase the wage to \$7.15 per hour by January 2007.

The proposal, however, appears to stand little chance of becoming law.

Both Mark Rickel, Gov. Bob Taft's spokesman, and House Speaker Jon Husted, R-Kettering, said they want to focus on tax reform to help create the jobs and incomes workers need. And Sen. Jay Hottinger, R-Newark, chairman of the Insurance, Commerce and Labor Committee, said, "It's not an understatement to say that it's not on the fast track."

Testifying before the committee, Sen. C.J. Prentiss, D-Cleveland, the bill's sponsor, said a higher minimum wage would decrease employee turnover and absenteeism, as well as increase morale and productivity.

Prentiss proposes to increase the state minimum wage to \$6.15 per hour by January 2006, followed by another dollar jump in 2007 "so businesses aren't hit with a sticker shock." Every year after, the minimum wage would be adjusted on Sept. 30 according to the rate of inflation over the past 12 months.

"To say, 'We value work,' and then to say, 'Lady, you need to work for \$5.15 an hour and make \$10,000 a year,' that's unconscionable," Prentiss said.

The federal minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour, but Ohio is one of two states — the other, Kansas — that sets a lower standard for businesses with gross annual sales less than \$500,000. In those cases, Ohio's minimum is \$4.25 an hour.

In a report released Tuesday, Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit research institute, also advocates a state minimum wage increase. Prentiss is a founding board member of the institute.

The report estimates that 446,000 Ohioans would be directly affected by the increase, and 37 percent of those workers provide their entire family's income.

But Edward Cain, spokesman for the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants, said the issue is too complex "to draw a line in the sand."

The council has not yet taken a position on the proposal.


But Cain said a minimum wage increase would put the crunch on business owners.

Workers' wages account for 60 percent of business costs, he said, so a \$1 increase can force a small-business owner to scramble to make up the difference.

"He either takes it off his own table, raises his prices ... or closes his door," he said.

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