



Democrats Propose Bill For \$15/Hour Minimum Wage By 2026

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FRANKFORT, Ky. — The federal minimum wage has been \$7.25 an hour since 2009, but 29 states require employers to pay more.

Kentucky is not one of those states.

State Sen. Reginald Thomas, D-Lexington, is pre-filing a bill to raise the state's minimum wage incrementally to \$15 an hour by 2026.

“Which means you still need government help to live,” said Thomas. “You need help in terms of food stamps; you need help in terms of a medical card; you still need federal assistance. And it’s ridiculous to say, ‘We want people to work, and we’ve still got to provide for them in terms of giving them medical aid and medical assistance.’”

Federal data shows only three percent of Kentucky’s workforce make the minimum wage — data that does not account for the coronavirus pandemic — but Thomas said raising it would still have a large impact on the economy.

“By increasing the minimum wage, you move more and more people out of poverty and you bring more and more money into the economy for people to spend and to give people a chance to live a decent life.”

The idea of increasing the minimum wage traditionally isn’t popular with Republicans who will control the agenda with majorities in both the Senate and the House.

The CATO Institute, a conservative think tank, claims raising the minimum wage could lead to job losses, may result in higher prices, and would have little impact on reducing poverty.

Thomas’ bill would take place over six years though, starting with an increase to \$9.50 an hour next July; a point state Rep. McKenzie Cantrell says is key.

“What we’re talking about is a gradual, incremental increase that is going to be a smooth transition for small businesses and it’s going to have a big impact on our workforce,” Cantrell said.

The question remains though: will this bill or any number of Democratic priorities make it through the legislature this year?

Thomas said he’s confident they can find common ground with the GOP.

“Even though our numbers are low in the Democratic party, we’re not going to come in January in the legislature and sit on our hands and be quiet. We’re not going to go in the back of the room and cower and be like we’re in timeout,” Thomas said. “No, our voice is going to be heard, we’re going to state our agenda, and we’re going to continue to assert what we think is right for the state.”

After this month’s election, Republicans will control 75 of the 100 seats in the House and 30 of the 38 seats in the Senate.

The next session starts in January.