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Council Members Open to Minimum Wage Increase for City Workers

By [Jeffrey Sullivan](#)

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Councilman Rey Saldana(D4) speaks during the COPS/Metro Alliance press conference for a higher minimum wage for City workers. Photo by Scott Ball/Rivard Report

The wage increase would apply to the City’s hourly employees, excluding police officers and firefighters, whose wages are set by union contract. The City Council is set to vote on the budget Sept. 14, and the fiscal year 2018 budget takes effect Oct. 1.

“[Our] plan has always been, and will continue to be, a commitment to getting the 15 [per hour] next year,” Mayor Ron Nirenberg said. There are currently 1,400 City workers who earn less than \$15 per hour.

Before the Council meeting Tuesday, [COPS/Metro Alliance](#) – a coalition of churches, schools, and labor unions – held a press conference on the steps of City Hall to continue its call for higher wages in San Antonio, more affordable housing, and immigrants’ rights.

COPS/Metro member Sister Consuelo Tovar commended [the City Council for providing \\$150,000](#) for what the organization described as “a legal defense fund for immigrants”. The alliance also praised the Council for its allocation of [Community Development Block Grant](#) funds.

“While COPS/Metro wants to publicly recognize the Council for fulfilling those two pledges, it is time for the Council to fulfill the pledges for Project Quest and wages,” Tovar said.



Sister Consuelo Tovar speaks at a COPS/Metro Alliance press conference at City Hall. Photo Scott Ball / Rivard Report

Project Quest is a workforce training program.

“[They] committed to increase Project Quest funding to \$2.5 million in the fiscal year 2018,” Tovar said. “This \$300,000 increase will result in 100 San Antonio citizens landing high-wage jobs.”

Council members Shirley Gonzales (D5), Rey Saldaña (D4), Roberto Treviño (D1), William “Cruz” Shaw (D2), and Ana Sandoval (D7) attended the press conference and spoke about their commitment for improving the lives of residents with their 2018 budget.

During the Council meeting, several Council members asked about the financial impact a \$14.25 per hour wage would have on the City budget.



(from left) Councilmen Roberto Trevino (D1), Rey Saldana(D4), and William "Cruz" Shaw(D2)attend a COPS/Metro Alliance press conference. Photo by Scott Ball / Rivard Report

Councilman Clayton Perry (D10) requested additional information on the cost of transitioning to a \$14.25 per-hour wage. Lori Steward, human resources director for the City of San Antonio, was unable to provide the annual cost for increasing the hourly wage from \$13.75 to \$14.25. During the meeting, City Manager Sheryl Sculley stated that an additional increase to \$14.50 would cost \$400,000, and an increase to \$14.75 would cost \$900,000. If made now, instituting a \$15 minimum wage would cost \$1.3 million.

Perry also asked if the City had any difficulties filling vacancies in its workforce.

“We do,” Steward said. “The labor market is rather tight right now, and we do see a gradual increase in time to fill” jobs because of lower unemployment rates.

Most Council members voiced their support for implementing a \$14.25 minimum wage.

COPS/Metro [hosted an “accountability session” in April](#) where Council members, then candidates, were asked if they would support advancing policies they are voting on now as members. Nirenberg, Treviño, Shaw, Saldaña, Gonzales, and Sandoval, along with District 3 Councilwoman Rebecca Viagran, all committed to raising city workers’ pay, among other issues.