

# Normative arguments for and against a living wage

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# Normative Arguments For And Against A Living Wage

Christine Qin



## Introduction

- Wages and labor have been crucial issues throughout much of the history of the United States, and they are matters that are still being deliberated at this very moment in both civil and political life.
- Using the framework of civic republicanism, it is evident that American society needs a living wage.
- The basic definition of a living wage: a wage that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living.



## Major Questions

- What exactly does a “normal standard of living” entail?
- Why is a lack of living wages unjust?
- Why does it matter that the workers in a society are able to live, not merely survive, off of their wages?
- What are the implications of a living wage on essential matters such as freedom, justice, and democracy?
- Why is there a need for living wages to be mandated by the government through legislation?

## Arguments For A Living Wage

### The Civic Republicanism Argument:

- Civic republicanism is a type of egalitarianism.
- From this perspective, democratic equality ought to ensure all law-abiding workers effective access to the social conditions of their freedom at all times.
- A living wage provides workers with the potential to fully participate in their societies, and that is essential to their freedom.
- Furthermore, a living wage allows workers to experience freedom as non-domination, which is much more just and desirable than freedom as non-interference.



### A Few Other Key Considerations:

- Issues of exploitation, especially in regards to vertical and horizontal relationships.
- The responsibilities that people within a society owe to each other.
- The responsibilities that a government owes to its citizens.
- The current structural forces that prevent higher minimum wages from naturally existing outside of legislative demands.

## Arguments Against A Living Wage

### The Libertarian Argument:

- Libertarians are also very concerned with freedom, but they have a very different conception than civic republicans do of what freedom rightfully means.
- For libertarians, freedom as non-interference is the morally just condition.

### The Economic Unemployment Argument:

- Some economists are concerned by the existence of minimum or living wages. They argue that increased unemployment is an unavoidable outcome of these types of wage laws.
- There are other economists who consider other methods such as the unconditional basic income or the earned income tax credit to be better anti-poverty approaches.



## Conclusion

An ethically just American society requires the existence of living wages. Without a living wage, low-wage workers are unable to fully participate in their society. Furthermore, there needs to be legislation that legally requires living wages, as it is otherwise unjustly burdensome for individuals to, on their own, implement such a high wage level against the many structural forces that exist.

## Key References

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