



Multnomah County Library workers Nicole Bilyeu, Bruce Jenks and Jennifer Behr are among roughly 160 workers at the County who will get sizable raises under a new union contract that sets a minimum wage of \$15 an hour.

Turning a page on a \$15 union contract minimum wage floor

Less than a week apart at the beginning of November, two Portland public employers announced agreements with American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) local unions to establish \$15 minimum wage floors in their contracts.

First was Home Forward, Portland's housing agency, adding a clause to Local 3135's existing contract. Then, days later, Multnomah County agreed with Local 88 on a new pact that included the \$15 minimum wage. Home Forward is raising 33 employees to \$15 immediately, while Multnomah County will phase in its 155 affected employees over the life of the three-year contract. Either way, the impact is significant.

Nine out of 10 of those who will benefit at Multnomah County are employed as pages at the county library — shelving books and helping library patrons with questions or library ac-

count maintenance.

"It's validation of the work we do," says Jennifer Behr, a 26-year page at Multnomah County Library. "What we do isn't 'minor' — it has value. It's also important that the county compensates even its lowest-paid workers with a living wage."

"For the first time, I have breathing room — that's the best way to put it," says Jasmine Criss, a Home Forward resident specialist at the 289-unit Hollywood East public housing complex. Criss is 22, single, and goes to Portland Community College part-time while working full-time at Home Forward. She's seeing an immediate wage increase of \$2.45 per hour (from \$12.55 to \$15), and says that difference is huge to her limited budget.

"It's been hard, especially going to school, to pay everything and balance my budget. Now I'm going to be able to do that, and I'll have about \$50 per

month left over for extras, or to simply save. I've never had that, so it's a big deal."

The budget of federally-funded Home Forward has recovered since last year's U.S. government sequestration hit the agency hard, says Local 3135 President Elyse Alexander.

"We went to our board last spring and opened discussions about implementing a \$15 minimum, living wage," Alexander said. "I think we opened their eyes with some examples. We had a 10-year Home Forward employee who still qualifies for living assistance from this agency despite working full-time. To their credit, our board recognized the problem and ultimately agreed to do the right thing."

(Editor's Note: Don Loving, Oregon AFSCME communications director, contributed to this report.)

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...Portland street fund

(From Page 19)

that the City tries to do most street maintenance work in-house, because it's more efficient. But the street fund would also open up opportunities for private sector jobs: Projects valued at over \$250,000 must be contracted to the private sector, under state law, and would be subject to a state requirement

to pay the prevailing wage. PBOT has estimated that the maintenance work would add 59 City jobs, including 28 front-line jobs. The ordinance would also lead to the creation of 22 new positions in the Revenue Bureau. The City hasn't produced an estimate of private sector jobs.

Portland City Council is expected to vote on the proposal Jan. 7.

Multnomah County commits to \$15 minimum wage for all employees

Seconds after the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners voted to ratify a collective bargaining agreement with AFSCME Local 88 at its Dec. 4 meeting, County Chair Deborah Kafoury had an announcement to make: The commitment to phase in a \$15 minimum wage rate — agreed to in the contract — will also apply to about 400 temporary and on-call workers at the County, even though they're not members of the bargaining unit. That includes about 300 temporary elections workers as well as about 45 on-call pages at the Multnomah County library.

Most of Local 88's 2,900 members at Multnomah County make more than \$15 an hour, but about 160 will get raises under the new contract floor — to \$13 immediately, \$14 as of July 2015, and \$15 as of July 2016.



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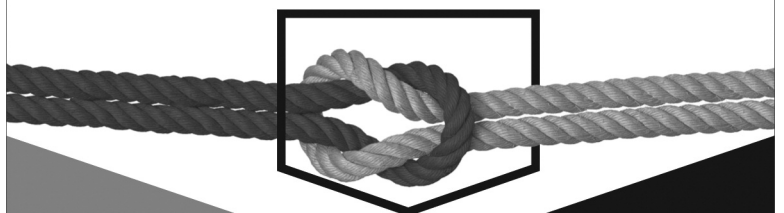
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