

Business Matters

Oregon Minimum Wage Has Increased Again

As usual, Commissioner Stephenson announced new minimum wage rates back in April of 2023. As of July 1st, 2023, Oregon minimum wage is \$14.20 per hour (standard minimum wage rate).

Other wage rates for special locations in Oregon have also increased as follows:

Portland Metro Minimum Wage: \$15.45 per hour

Non-Urban Minimum Wage: \$13.20 per hour

Under Oregon law, Oregon minimum wage will update each year, and each year such update will be calculated and an-

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Breaking Down the OFLA & Paid Leave Oregon

With Paid Leave Oregon benefits beginning on September 3, 2023, the Oregon Employment Department and the Oregon Bureau of Labor & Industries have published a fact sheet to help navigate questions.

Set to answer common questions the fact sheet will cover the interaction between leave taken under Paid Leave Oregon and leave taken under the Oregon Family Leave Act ("OFLA"). Although Senate Bill 999, which amended both Paid Leave Oregon and OFLA, attempted to bring these two leave laws into alignment, there is still tension between the two laws.

Generally, employees are eligible to take 16 (or up to 18 weeks) of total leave—including both unpaid OFLA leave and paid leave taken under Paid Leave Oregon, during a Paid Leave Oregon benefit year. Additionally, if an employee's reason for leave qualifies under both Paid Leave Oregon and OFLA, the leave must be taken concurrently. However, employers may not require that their employees apply for Paid Leave Oregon benefits.

In a nutshell, this means that OFLA leave taken prior to an employee beginning their Paid Leave Oregon benefit year will not reduce the amount of leave under Paid Leave Oregon they may be eligible to take. Similarly, OFLA leave taken before September 3, 2023, will not reduce the amount of leave under Paid Leave Oregon available.

However, assuming that the employer's Paid Leave Oregon and OFLA benefit years are aligned, this potential for "stacking" is eliminated if an employee chooses to apply for and take Paid Leave Oregon first or concurrently with OFLA. But if an employee's reason for leave qualifies under both Paid Leave Oregon and OFLA, and the employee decides not to apply for Paid Leave Oregon benefits at the outset, then that employee is entitled to exhaust their OFLA leave (for up to 36 weeks of protected leave) and subsequently apply for Paid Leave Oregon (for up to 14 weeks of protected leave).

Now, if an employee's reason for leave qualifies under both Paid Leave Oregon and OFLA, but the employee does decide to apply for Paid Leave Oregon benefits at the outset, then that employee will concurrently exhaust their Paid Leave Oregon and OFLA leave and may take up to a maximum of 14 weeks of paid leave under Paid Leave Oregon and up to an additional four weeks of unpaid OFLA leave during the same benefit year.

At the top of that, the fact sheet notes that, while OFLA permits an employer to require an employee to take parental leave all at once, Paid Leave Oregon allows parental leave to be taken intermittently. Accordingly, employers must allow employees using Paid Leave Oregon to take parental leave intermittently so long as they take time off in full day increments.

Dollar General in Yoncalla

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their urban stores, often within blocks of each other, Dollar general has no problem opening in the smallest or sparsest of counties. In rural parts of the country, as many as nearly half of Dollar General's stores are located in counties with less than 100 people per square mile. Due to the low overhead of the stores, it allows them to open up where no one else can. The stores sell little-to-no produce and hire few workers.

But dollar stores are also seeing some pushback from residents and neighbors nearby. At least 75 communities have rejected dollar stores since 2019. Advocacy groups believe the chains hurt communities in several ways, including pushing out grocers, creating dangerous workplaces with thin staff and exacerbating food deserts. Forcing out mom-and-pop stores. Providing fewer jobs while paying less. Harming public health. These are just a few problems attributed to dollar stores.

According to critics, stripping communities of wealth while offering little-to-no fresh food and giving back dangerous, low-paying jobs is the legacy that accompanies these establishments.

In separate statements, Dollar General and Family Dollar said their stores are compliments to grocers. Dollar General added, these types of bans only hurt customers who can rely on these stores to stretch budgets already squeezed by inflation.

It's true that plenty of shoppers love dollar store brands. And when it comes to the public health and economic consequences of the chains, some researchers say there isn't enough evidence yet to justify the villain label. Some believe the stores could even benefit rural shoppers who have few nearby alternatives for buying necessities.

So why does the dollar store expansion

seem to wear so heavily on the grocery store when there are plenty of worries for independent grocery stores. Trouble finding workers and fewer customers in shrinking small towns is enough of a problem.

In rural Kansas, grocery store owners labeled the dollar stores as the top challenge alongside competition from supermarkets in a 2021 survey. Some grocers said a dollar store opening nearby could cause a 20-to-30% drop in sales, a catastrophic decline when profit margins can be as little as 1-to-2%.

The risk of dollar chains closing grocers is about more than communities losing another business, according to Erica Blair, program manager for Kansas State University's Rural Grocery Initiative, which conducted the survey. Grocers often act as town anchors and gathering spots. Owners invest in the community, and money spent at independent grocers circulates back through the local economy. There's also the fresh produce that's rare-to-nonexistent in many dollar stores. In other words, a dollar store is no substitute for a grocer.

Dollar stores aren't winning the free market game over grocers. Instead they take unfair advantage of using their market size to negotiate better deals than small businesses receive. That Kansas Report says they often provide "cheater" sizes exclusively to dollar stores. These products look the same as the ones sold by grocers, just slightly smaller. For example, a Snickers at a dollar store could weigh two ounces less than those sold at a grocery store. While it might be priced cheaper at the dollar store, it might actually be more expensive per ounce.

Beyond what the stores sell inside, dollar store brands also provide fewer jobs and tax

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