

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 18TH DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2024

The Caddo Parish Economic Development Committee met in legal session on the above date at 1:47 p.m. in the Government Plaza Chambers Conference Room, with the following members were present constituting a quorum: Commissioners Atkins, Cothran, Gage-Watts, Jones, and G. Young (5). ABSENT: Commissioners Burrell, Thomas, and J. Young (3).

Mr. Jones gave the invocation, and Mr. Cothran led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance. There were no Agenda Additions nor any Public Comments, so the Committee moved onto New Business.

NEW BUSINESS

- *Continued discussion and final recommendation of Ordinance No. 6477 of 2024, to require that companies contracting with Caddo Parish Commission provide a living wage to employees*

Mr. G. Young said that this is continued discussion regarding Ordinance No. 6477 of 2024. Legal researched the matter and found no general prohibition against a living wage for contractors, but restrictions exist for contracts subject to Public Bid Law, which is contracts for Public Works over \$75k. These types of contracts would have to be exempted from this ordinance. Attorney Frazier further explained that the New Orleans model does not consider student workers and unpaid volunteers covered by their Living Wage Ordinance.

Attorney Frazier then talked about their enforcement mechanism. They are allowed to self-certify. She also said that they have a portal on their workforce development website where someone can report an organization who is not paying their employees a living wage.

Mrs. Bryant said that service type contracts, i.e. cleaning, lawn maintenance, etc., are the contracts that are not covered under Public Bid Law. She also said that the majority of the larger contracts already pay \$15 per hour, but there are some smaller contracts which do not pay their employees \$15 per hour.

Mr. Atkins said that there was some discussion about exempting companies who have 15 or less employees. Mr. G. Young agreed and said that small businesses may not be able to comply with this.

Attorney Frazier pointed out that this would only apply to contracts with the Parish.

Mr. Atkins said that government should not mandate businesses to pay a certain wage. He is open to discussions on the topic, but skeptical about government intervention. He opposes government imposing its will on private businesses. He also said that imposing regulation on contractors may not bring significant economic benefits and could increase bureaucratic hassles for contractors.

Mr. G. Young said that people are not migrating to the south because of economic opportunities. People prefer living in areas with higher living standards, so Mr. G. Young would like to create higher living standards so that people "march to the South".

Mr. Atkins agreed that Louisiana does not have a minimum wage, and pointed out that Louisiana does fall back on the federal minimum wage.

Mr. G. Young said that work is valuable and should be recognized by paying better wages. He then talked about the Neighborhood Youth Corps which offered federal grants to employ youth. He expressed concern that wages have not kept pace with inflation and that people are not earning a living wage.

Mr. G. Young then talked about the Sanitation Workers' strike in Memphis that highlighted the poor working conditions and low wages of the workers. He recalled that the workers wore t-shirts with the words 'I am a man' and 'I am a woman' to assert their dignity. The strike brought attention to the importance of recognizing and respecting all workers.

Mr. G. Young also talked about the discrimination he faced as an African American in the workplace during the summer. He recalled that his job was to clean the restrooms and mop the floors because African Americans were not allowed to work the register.

Mr. G. Young said that there is serious wage disparity in this country, and he wants to do his part to address it.

Mr. Atkins is in support of living wages for the employees of Caddo Parish, but he is not in support of imposing his views on others. He feels that it is the responsibility of the small business owners to pay their team fair wages to maintain their employees' dignity and prevent them from seeking better opportunities elsewhere.

Mr. Thomas apologized for his tardiness. He agreed with the need for better access to wages for the citizens. This wage would set a standard for workers to enhance their quality of life.

Mrs. Blake wanted to know how this would apply to tiered positions, such as internships and apprenticeships.

Mr. Cothran would like everyone to be on the same page. He wanted to know if this would need to be voted on right now. He supports the theory, but has concerns about the viability of the proposal. He worries that efforts may be wasted if it is not adhered to.

Mr. Atkins wanted to know what was the minimum wage that was being discussed. Mr. G. Young said that it was \$15 per hour.

Mr. Thomas suggested submitting a compliance report saying the employees are paid \$15 per hour. Mr. G. Young said that a whistleblower type program will be implemented for anonymous reporting of violations of the ordinance.

Mr. G. Young said that imperfections exist, but the focus should be on addressing injustices. He also said that defection is not an excuse for inaction, and efforts should be made to improve people's lives. He is committed to making a positive impact and helping others.

Attorney Frazier asked for clarification on organizations who will be exempted and other specific criteria that Mr. G. Young would like to be included in the ordinance. Mr. G. Young said that contracts subject to Public Bid Law would be exempt; companies with 15 or less employees would be exempt; NGOs would be exempt; student workers and unpaid volunteers would be exempt.

Mrs. Bryant asked if self-reporting through the contract process could be included.

Mrs. Gage-Watts wanted to know if the number of employees could be flexible. Mrs. Bryant explained that it would be determined by when the contract was signed. If the company had 15 employees when the contract was signed, then they would be exempt; but, if they renewed their contract and had 16 employees, then they would be subject to the ordinance.

Mrs. Gage-Watts suggested adding language in the ordinance regarding temporary employees. Attorney Frazier said that companies may exploit this rule to their advantage.

It was **moved by Mrs. Gage-Watts**, seconded by Mr. Cothran, *that the recommendation to require companies who contract with the Parish and employ over 15 employees provide a livable wage of \$15 per hour.*

Mr. Jones wants to ensure that the language to be absolutely clear.

Mrs. Gage-Watts wanted to ensure that this would exclude the NGOs. Mr. G. Young agreed.

Mrs. Bryant suggested listing the language that is needed to be included in the ordinance. Attorney Frazier agreed and listed the following:

- *Companies who have fewer than 16 employees are exempt;*
- *Public Bid contracts are exempt;*
- *NGOs, Economic Development, and Riverboat are exempt;*
- *Companies will be allowed to self-certify;*
- *Volunteers and student workers are exempt; and*
- *Persons can anonymously report violations that would be investigated*

Mr. Cothran wanted to know who would conduct the investigation. Mrs. Bryant said that Purchasing would.

At this time, Mrs. Gage-Watts' motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Cothran, Gage-Watts, Jones, Thomas, and G. Young (5). NAYS: Commissioner Atkins (1). ABSENT: Commissioners Burrell and J. Young (2). ABSTAIN: None (0).

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.



Michelle Nations
Assistant to the Commission Clerk