

BEST STATES TO WORK INDEX 2025: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Best States to Work Index offers opportunities for both federal and state policymakers to proactively improve the lives of workers and working families. While some states are rolling back protections, others are modeling how to strengthen workers' rights. Oxfam celebrates where progress has been made and hopes this resource can help push for continued progress at the state and federal levels.

WAGES

Oxfam calls on both state and federal policymakers to RAISE THE WAGE. Subminimum tipped wages should be abolished, minimum wage exclusions of certain workers must end, and the minimum wage needs to be lifted.

- At the federal level, there is a piece of legislation ready to implement all these policies: the [Raise the Wage Act](#). It would raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$17 over five years; enact automatic, indexed wage increases; and gradually eliminate subminimum wages for tipped workers, disabled workers, and youth.
- While we wait for the federal government to raise the minimum wage, **states have the power to raise their own minimum wage**. And what's more, some states have passed legislation to index automatic minimum wage increases to inflation.¹ More states should adopt the same policy.
- [Washington's](#) minimum wage, while still inadequate to support a family, is a good model for states to consider, as it 1) has a high ratio of wage-to-cost-of-living; 2) ties automatic annual wage increases to the level of inflation; 3) allows localities to set a higher wage than the state standard; and 4) eliminates the subminimum tipped wage, making it a "one fair wage" state. However, Washington fails to fully extend minimum wage protections to farmworkers.

Given the extreme cost of care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, and the burden these costs place on already insufficient wages, there is a serious need for federal investment in the care economy. Congress can help make care services more accessible and affordable, while increasing pay for child-care workers and early educators, including through the [Child Care for Working Families Act](#) and the [Child Care for Every Community Act](#).

WORKER PROTECTIONS

We need stronger worker protections at the state and federal levels, including paid family and medical leave, strengthened equal pay laws, paid pumping breaks, stronger child labor laws, and protections for domestic workers.² Happily, there are already bills available for the federal government to adopt that will improve the worker protection landscape for all workers in the US. And some states are moving to strengthen worker protections on their own.

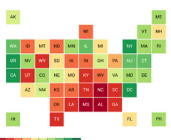
PAID LEAVE

Congress should provide paid sick and family leave for all workers. To establish federal paid leave standards, Congress should pass:

- The [FAMILY Act](#), which provides up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for reasons ranging from medical issues to childbirth, or to support care responsibilities.
- The [Healthy Families Act](#), which guarantees up to seven paid sick days a year for short-term illness, preventive care, caring for a sick family member, or seeking assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Congress should pass the [Job Protection Act](#) to expand access to unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and the [Caring for All Families Act](#), which expands the definition of "family" under the FMLA.

- **States have started to fill the gap** by enacting paid sick and family leave programs. [Oregon's paid leave policy](#) is comprehensive, covering private, public, and part-time employees, and extending "safe leave" coverage for survivors of sexual assaults, domestic violence, harassment, or stalking.



To see the full data set or where states rank, please visit oxfam.org/statemap2025



EQUAL PAY

The [Paycheck Fairness Act](#) aims to close the gender wage gap by strengthening the Equal Pay Act, including limiting employers' reliance on an applicant's salary history, protecting workers from retaliation for discussing their wages, and requiring employers to prove that pay disparities are not solely related to gender.

- **States can strengthen equal pay laws**, too, by mandating equal pay across both the private and public sectors, and restricting pay secrecy practices and salary history requirements in the private sector. [New York](#) and [New Jersey](#)'s equal pay laws include a comprehensive list of protected classes (including gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, and, in New York's case, even domestic violence victim status).

PROTECTIONS FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

The [Domestic Workers Bill of Rights](#) extends pay and leave rights to domestic workers while mandating health and safety precautions, including language around fair and fixed scheduling. [Twelve states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and two major cities](#) have already passed their own domestic workers bill of rights.

HEAT PROTECTION STANDARDS

As temperatures and heat-related worker deaths continue to climb, a set of federal heat protections for all workers is essential. Congress should pass the [Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness, Injury, and Fatality Prevention Act](#), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) should enact its [proposed regulation](#) protecting indoor and outdoor workers from heat.

- While we wait for the federal heat standard, **states can implement their own** heat-related worker protections. In fact, Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado, Maryland, and Nevada have issued their own heat standards. Other states should follow suit, and all should include protections for both outdoor and indoor workers.

WAREHOUSE WORKER PROTECTIONS

Congress should pass the [Warehouse Worker Protection Act](#) to protect workers from abusive, dangerous productivity and speed quotas that drive high rates of worker injury. The bill requires transparency around quotas, prohibits management from enforcing quotas that interfere with workers' ability to take breaks or use the restroom, and protects workers from punishment for failing to meet impermissible quotas.

- [Washington](#), [Oregon](#), [New York](#), [Minnesota](#), and [California](#) have already enacted their own warehouse worker protection laws. Other states should follow suit.

FIGHTING INEQUALITY TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

Oxfam believes that poverty is a policy choice, and that the ultrawealthy and giant corporations have hijacked our systems to benefit a select few. We are working to redress the balance of power, putting it back in the hands of working families in the US and around the world.

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RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE

The federal government must enshrine the rights of workers to build power collectively. At the state level, the prevalence of "right-to-work" laws demonstrates the systematic approach to undermining worker power and the clear need for the federal government to protect workers' rights to organize. To that end, the federal government has one crucial piece of legislation to pass:

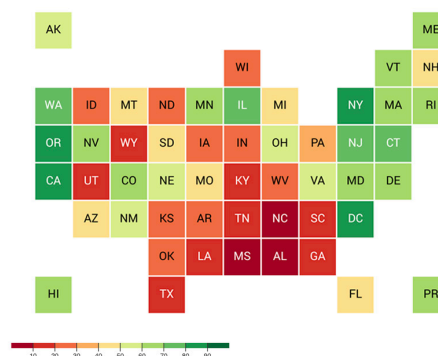
- The [Richard L. Trumka Protecting the Right to Organize \("PRO"\) Act](#), a bill that expands the protections around workers' rights to bargain and organize as a collective.

States, meanwhile, can support rights to organize, including by:

- Repealing "right-to-work" laws. [Michigan](#) recently repealed its "right-to-work" law, the first state to do so in many years.
- Protecting the rights of state and local employees, including public school teachers, to collectively bargain. [Illinois](#) is a good example.

EXPLORE THE INTERACTIVE MAPS

To see the full data set or where states rank, please visit oxf.am/statemap2025



1. Dave Kamper and Sebastian Martinez Hickey, "Tying Minimum-Wage Increases to Inflation, as 13 States Do, Will Lift Up Low-Wage Workers and Their Families across the Country," Working Economics Blog, EPI, accessed August 14, 2023, <https://www.epi.org/blog/tying-minimum-wage-increases-to-inflation-as-12-states-do-will-lift-up-low-wage-workers-and-their-families-across-the-country/>.
2. There are many additional, urgently needed worker protections, including strengthened protections against discrimination and harassment, protections against wage theft, and protections against unfair scheduling practices. Congress should pass—and states can follow the model of—the [BE HEARD in the Workplace Act](#), the [Schedules That Work Act](#), and the [Part-Time Worker Bill of Rights Act](#), to start.