

The Minnesota Supreme Court Endorses Progressive Action by Local Governments to the Benefit of Employees



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In a landmark case, *Graco, Inc. v. City of Minneapolis*,¹ the Minnesota Supreme Court recently rendered a nationally significant decision that affirms the importance of progressive action at the local level. Notably, Republican-appointed Chief Justice Lorie Gildea authored the unanimous decision in *Graco*.

For 2 main reasons, the Minnesota Supreme Court unanimously rejected the conflict and preemption arguments conjured up by corporate interests opposed to a more balanced economy via local wage laws.² First, progressive local action to increase wages does not conflict with State law, the Minnesota Fair Labor Standards Act,³ given State law provides a floor rather than a ceiling for wages.⁴ Second, State law does not preempt progressive local action to increase wages because State law does not fully occupy the field of employee wages given wages are not solely a matter of State concern.⁵

In short, local jurisdictions like Minneapolis now indisputably have the right to raise the minimum wage⁶ for employees who work there to \$15 or more per hour. The legal authority to take such progressive action generally flows from localities' home rule powers⁷ over public health, safety, and the general welfare of those who live or work there.⁸

Powerful corporate interests, including the Chamber of Commerce, fought for 3 years against the progressive local action ultimately endorsed by the Minnesota Supreme Court. Like in other parts of the country, corporate groups have sought to thwart local democracy through costly litigation and aggressive lobbying orchestrated by the American Legislative Exchange Council⁹ and similar groups. Those efforts to put profits over people in Minnesota failed, however, and over 70,000 employees in Minneapolis will be receiving substantial wage increases as a result.

As the National Employment Law Project recently observed,¹⁰ this hard-fought victory in Minnesota offers an inspiring example to the entire nation. This is particularly true for anyone who cares about workplace fairness as the United States Department of Labor, the National Labor Relations Board, and the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission each roll back rights under the dictates of the Trump Administration.¹¹ ▮

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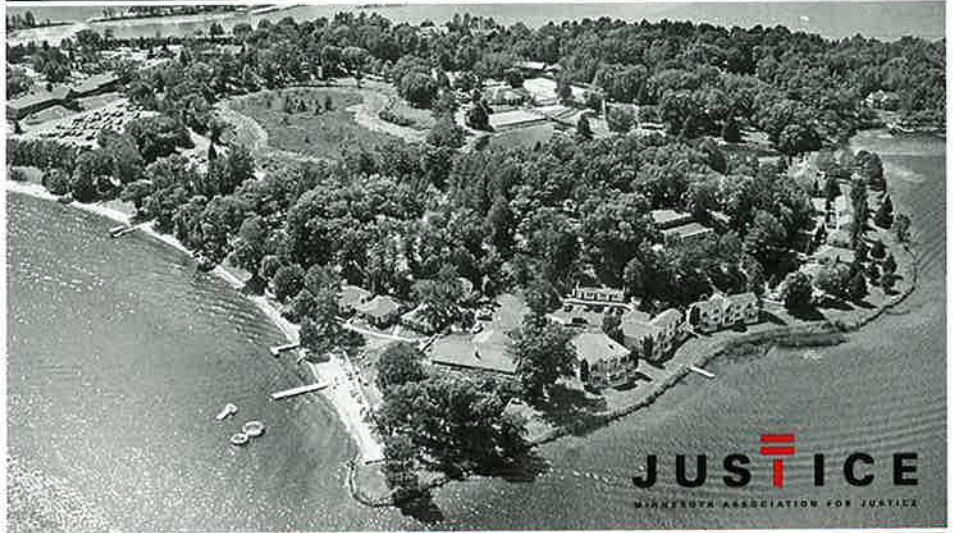
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¹937 N.W.2d 756 (Minn. 2020).

²See, e.g., M.C.O. §§ 40.320, *et seq.* (raising the minimum hourly wage to \$15.00 for employees working in Minneapolis).

³Min. Stat. §§ 177.21, *et seq.*

⁴*Graco*, 937 N.W.2d at pp. 759-62.

⁵*Id.* at pp. 762-66.

⁶Min. Stat. §§ 177.21, *et seq.*

⁷<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/government/ord/index.htm>

⁸*Graco*, 937 N.W.2d at p. 759.

⁹See, e.g., https://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/What_is_ALEC.

¹⁰<https://www.nelp.org/news-releases/minnesota-supreme-court-upholds-minneapolis-15-minimum-wage>.

¹¹See, e.g., <https://www.nelp.org/tracker>.

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