

Ohio GOP Bill Would Give Counties, Cities Option on Paying Prevailing Wages

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Ohio's counties and cities would have the ability to decide whether they want to pay state-mandated prevailing wages on taxpayer-funded projects, or allow contractors to bid on projects without such requirements, under a bill expected to be introduced in the General Assembly this week.

State Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima), who is sponsoring the bill, said that local governments could save money by paying market-rate wages rather than the prevailing wage, which is set by the Ohio Commerce Director and establishes the minimum hourly wage as well as benefits that workers may be paid, based on their trade and the location of the job.

"Each of the local jurisdictions should be able to decide what they pay for what they're going to get," Huffman told cleveland.com. "When the city of Lima goes to buy paper products, they don't have to pay what the city of Cincinnati pays. They pay what the market bears."

Union representatives have said that, without the prevailing wage, construction workers would earn 16 percent less on average. They also said that the prevailing wage, which local governments have been required to pay for most projects since 1931, takes into account local economic forces. For instance, a plumber in Cuyahoga County should earn \$34.90 an hour while a plumber in Hamilton County should earn \$30.30 an hour.

This proposal may be the first step in the GOP's strategy to pass a right-to-work bill in Ohio (see ["Right-to-Work" Momentum Building in 2017](#)). Kentucky recently joined Michigan and Indiana in outlawing workplace rules and collective bargaining agreements that require private-sector employees to pay fees or dues even if they do not belong to the union.

In any event, Huffman stressed that his bill would not require local governments to pay market-rate wages but only give them a choice in the matter. That is something they have not had since 1931.

If you have any questions on this topic please contact a member of our [Labor & Employment Practice Group](#).

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