

# Virginia House Democrats call for doubling minimum wage, increasing teacher pay

By Tyler Arnold | Watchdog.org

High



High school students, union activists and fast food workers marched in New York City to demand a \$15 per hour federal minimum wage Apr. 15, 2015.

## Virginia House Minority Leader Eileen Filler-Corn speaks about priorities in the first session of 2019.

Virginia House Democrats on Tuesday unveiled their plans for the first session of 2019, including an increased minimum wage, a pay raise for teachers, action on criminal justice reform and making voting easier.

Virginia's minimum wage currently is \$7.25 an hour.

"That is just not enough," Del. Jeion Ward, D-Hampton, said during the House Democrats' news conference.

Ward and House Democrats propose increasing the state's minimum wage to \$15 per hour, which would more than double the current rate and be the highest in the country. The annual salary of a worker making minimum wage would increase from \$15,000 a year to about \$31,200.

Additionally, Ward chastised the state's workers' rights record and said that workers need to be granted more protections in the area of workers' compensation. Firefighters, she said, should also be covered for post traumatic stress disorder.

In addition to the large minimum wage increase, House Democrats said teachers in the commonwealth are not paid enough. Del. Cheryl Turpin, D-Virginia Beach, said House Democrats will back Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam's plan to increase teacher salaries by an additional five percent. A pay increase, she said, is essential to ensuring that students have good quality teachers.

Turpin, who is a teacher, discussed other ways that Virginia can ensure good quality teachers and fix what she called a shortage of teachers in the commonwealth. First, she said Virginia would need to analyze why teachers are leaving the profession with an outgoing survey. Second, she said that all teachers should have a guaranteed half-hour lunch. Although many teachers already get this, she said there is no mandate and there are some teachers who go without this length of a lunch.

House Democrats also unveiled plans to reform the criminal justice system and making voting easier.

Alfonso Lopez, D-Arlington, called for fair and equitable treatment in the criminal justice system. He said that the criminal justice system disproportionately harms people of color and the poor. Some areas in which the state can alleviate these problems, he said, is by removing the ability to confiscate drivers' licenses for non-driving related crimes and by decriminalizing the possession of marijuana.

Del Charniele Herring, D-Alexandria said during the news conference that Virginia has some of the most restrictive laws on voting. She said she hopes Democrats can work with Republicans to eliminate the voter I.D. law and make absentee voting easier.

Minority Leader Eileen Filler-Corn also called for measures to combat gun violence and measures to ensure public safety.

"We look forward to a successful session," Filler-Corn said.

Democrats have a narrow minority in the House of Delegates and in the Senate, but hold the governor's seat. Some Republicans have already shown a willingness to work with Democrats on the minimum wage increase, with two Republicans in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee voting to advance the bill through the committee.