Supporters of a statewide minimum wage increase say it will boost the economy by putting more money into a worker’s pocket.

Opponents say it will harm Washington because it would be unaffordable for business owners.

Washington economists grapple to figure out what the statewide economic impact of a higher minimum wage would be.

Initiative Measure 1433, if passed, would raise Washington’s minimum wages to $13.50 by 2020. The increase would come in four 50 cent increments from $11 in 2017.  Also, employees would earn one hour paid sick leave per 40 hours worked.

Approximately one million workers will receive paid sick leave and 730,000 will earn a higher minimum wage, according to Raise Up Washington, a pro-1433 group.

The current minimum wage in Washington is $9.47 per hour, or for someone working 40-hour work-weeks, approximately $19,697 per year before taxes.

Raise Up Washington, a coalition endorsed by Hillary Clinton, small business owners, social justice groups, unions and workers in the grocery and health care professions, wrote a statement supporting the initiative on the Washington voter guide.

They have been knocking on doors, airing television ads and calling voters on a daily basis to raise awareness of the benefits and to get people vote yes.

No one, especially families and minorities, should struggle to make ends meet, said Raise Up Washington spokesman Jack Sorensen.

Minimum wage workers will earn $600 more per month by 2020, Sorensen said.

“When low wage workers earn more, they spend more in their local communities,” he said.

Every time the federal minimum wage is raised, except during a recession, it resulted in job growth, he said.

“People should be able to live comfortably,” said Safeway manager and UFCW Local 21 executive board member Ariana Davis.

She was among the authors of the pro-1433 argument in the Washington voter’s guide and said she has been encouraging fellow union workers at Safeway, QFC and Fred Meyer to vote yes.

She said she’s tired of seeing employees being underpaid and going to work while sick, out of fear of losing their job or a day’s wages.

She has been talking to several small business owners in the Seattle area and they have met her with enthusiasm over minimum wage increases, she said.

“People are going to adapt,” Davis said.  “It's going to be great.”

Keep Washington Competitive, a coalition endorsed by the Washington Farm Bureau, the Association of Washington Business, unions and small business owners, wrote an anti-1433 statement in the Washington voter’s guide.

They say that a higher minimum wage would decrease the economic competitiveness of Washington and be hard on small business owners.

“They wake up every day wondering ‘how am I going to pay my workers?’” said Yvette Ollada, spokeswoman for Keep Washington Competitive.

Minimum wage workers won’t benefit because their hours will be cut, Ollada said.

“The reality is prices are going to go up,” said Bob Battles, the director of government affairs for the Association of Washington Business.

Businesses would “close up shop” and move out of state to Nevada and Wisconsin, where the labor market would be better, he said.  And 30 percent of firms will reduce the number of worker hours.

In the case of hospitality, businesses such as hotels may no longer be able to expand, or include restaurants, he said.  The food would have to be made somewhere else and brought in to be sold.

There still isn’t enough data about minimum wage increases to make a conclusion about the economic impact for urban and rural Washington, said the Regional Labor Economist Anneliese Vance Sherman.

Whether 1433 passes, or if minimum wage increases slowly over time, Sherman said “there are benefits and drawbacks of what will happen.”

A full-time minimum wage worker could support a family of three in 1968, according to the US Department of Labor.

Today, a family of three in Washington supported by a minimum wage worker would be under the Federal Poverty Level of $20,160, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Some anti-1433 campaigners say that minimum wage is not meant to support a family, or be a career, but is an entry level job for teenagers.

“Minimum wage is intended to be an entry-level workforce wage,” said John Stuhlmiller, the CEO of the Washington Farm Bureau. “It’s a way to learn a good work ethic.”

He was one of the authors of the anti-1433 argument in the Washington voter’s guide

Wages are meant to stay low, so one is encouraged to gain soft skills, seek new work and “move up the ladder in hard work and diligence,” Stuhlmiller said.

Sorensen of Raise Up Washington said he disagrees.

“It’s a *Leave it to Beaver* idea” and a “corporate campaign against Washington families,” he said.

We live in a “modern family world” and there are systematic barriers towards Latinos and African Americans who often rely on minimum wage, he said.

Approximately 45 percent of Latinos and 41 percent of African Americans make less than $13.50, he said.

Regardless of Initiative 1433’s passage, Washington State Department of Labor and Industries will increase minimum wage by six cents on Jan. 1 because the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers rose by 0.7 percent.

This is calculated by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, based on a measure of goods needed for everyday living in urban environments.

It includes food; sales and excise taxes; housing, such as rent, furniture and fuel oil; clothing; transportation, including new vehicles, insurance and airfare; medical care, such as prescription medicines, physician care and hospital care; recreation; education, including college tuition, telephone services and computer software; phone costs; and goods and services, including haircuts, cigarettes and funerals.

Federal minimum wage is $7.25 and has not been raised by the U.S. Department of Labor since 2009, when it increased by 70 cents.