

Increase gives city one of highest rates in U.S.

Rate adjusted with inflation each year; state's wage to rise

BY ELLIOTT WENZLER

EWENZLER@DENVERPOST.COM

Denver's minimum wage will automatically rise to \$19.29 per hour this week as the rate is adjusted for inflation at the start of 2026.

Under city rules, the Denver Department of Finance tweaks the minimum wage each year based on the Consumer Price Index. That means an increase of 2.56% starting on Thursday, boosting the current minimum wage of \$18.81 per hour.

Denver is among the U.S. cities with the highest minimum wages. The highest rate is in a suburb outside Seattle that will see its minimum wage rise to \$21.65 per hour in 2026.

The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 and the Colorado minimum wage in 2026 will be \$15.16, going up from \$14.81.

The annual adjustments are intended as a way to keep wages for the lowest-paid employees on track with inflation-related cost-of-living increases.

"Ensuring everyone earns at least Denver's minimum wage helps reduce the harms of poverty, including eviction and hunger, and strengthens Denver as a place to work, live and do business," said Tim O'Brien, the city's elected auditor.

The Office of the Auditor is the entity that investigates cases of wage theft, most commonly when employers don't pay their workers the minimum wage, according to a news release from the office. Workers at the highest risk of underpayments are those at restaurants, bars, strip clubs, cleaning services, retail outlets and gig app companies.

In 2025, Denver officials increased the minimum wage 2.84%. In 2024 there was an even bigger adjustment, with a 5.8% increase as inflation was much higher.

Denver businesses that employ tipped workers, like restaurants and coffee shops, are able to offset how much they pay those employees, as long as the workers receive at least the minimum wage in tips. Employers can offset those wages up to \$3.02 per hour, meaning the minimum wage employers must pay their tipped workers will be \$16.27 in 2026.

Denver is among a handful of cities and counties that have adopted minimum wages higher than the state's. Denver has the highest wage, followed by Edgewater, which is increasing its minimum wage to \$18.17 in 2026 — while opting to keep its tipped wage steady. The minimum wages for the City of Boulder and Boulder County (covering unincorporated areas) will each rise to \$16.82 for 2026.

Those who believe they may not be paid Denver's minimum wage can contact the Denver Labor office within the auditor's office.