



Missouri House targets prevailing wage law

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The Missouri House gave initial approval Tuesday to a bill repealing Missouri's prevailing wage law for public construction projects, a move targeted by GOP legislative leaders as a priority this year.

Currently, cities, school districts and other governmental entities must pay more than the state's standard minimum wage for construction and maintenance work. The exact amount is determined by a project's location and the type of work being done.

Many Republicans have tried to change the law for years. During a House debate Tuesday, proponents of the repeal said that lowering the wages employers were required to pay would allow more schools, roads and other projects to be built with taxpayer dollars.

"This will let us do more with the same amount of money," said Rep. Jeffery Justus, a Republican from Branson who is the bill's sponsor.

Opponents argued that the change would hurt workers.

"The reason why the government had to step in to create prevailing wage is because of the greed of companies," Rep. Karla May, a St. Louis Democrat, said. Companies were "not willing to pay workers, and not willing to maintain good working conditions," she said.

Representatives endorsed the bill 86-63. Another vote is needed to send it to the Senate, where a similar bill stalled last year.

The required prevailing wage currently is determined by surveys voluntarily filled out by contractors. Democratic lawmakers argued that if more construction contractors reported their wages, the data would help address concerns that wages were inflated.

Some Republicans also expressed skepticism that a straight repeal was the best way to address complaints about the law.

Rep. Kevin Engler, a Republican from Farmington, wondered if the law could be tweaked on a county-by-county basis to make projects more affordable.