

News from...

Raise the Wage Campaign

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Legislature Vacations, Ignores Recommendations

Minimum Wage Increase Long Overdue

TRENTON— Despite a December 2007 state commission report that recommended New Jersey increase its minimum wage, the Legislature left Trenton for the summer without hearing several wage bills introduced since January. A coalition of fair wage advocates came to the State House today to say that was wrong and issue a new call for an increase to at least \$8.50 an hour.

The Raise the Wage Campaign also called for New Jersey to join the 10 other states whose minimum wage goes up automatically to keep up with the cost of living. In addition, the Campaign proposed more protection for workers whose income includes tips. In most states, these workers receive a base wage set by law at a level that helps ensure that the wage and tips combine to equal at least minimum wage. New Jersey is one of two states with no base wage. The Campaign called for a wage set of at least 65 percent of the regular minimum wage.

The state Minimum Wage Advisory Commission, created in April 2005 when the most recent state minimum wage increase was adopted, proposed a 2008 increase to \$8.25 per hour and automatic cost-of-living adjustments each year. It called the current \$7.15 wage insufficient to support a full-time worker in New Jersey and found that the minimum wage's purchasing power has dropped even since October 2006 when the current state minimum wage took effect.

Today, 14 states and the District of Columbia have a higher minimum wage than New Jersey's, though most have a lower cost of living. In its report, the Commission noted that New Jersey's cost of living has risen 56 percent faster than the state's minimum wage. It stated that failure to increase the state minimum wage amounts to "an inflation-induced pay cut." The full state report can be found at:

<http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/formspdfs/lwdhome/Spotlight/MinimumWageAdvisoryCommissionReport.pdf>

According to data from the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, nearly 40 percent of minimum wage workers are between the ages of 25 and 64, and New Jersey's current minimum wage of \$7.15 would not keep a family of three above the federal poverty threshold of \$17,600.

Statements of Raise the Wage Campaign Partners:

"New Jersey's high cost of living continues to hurt our low-income working families. A single parent with two children working full time at minimum wage earns less than 85 percent of the federal poverty level. Raising the minimum wage to \$8.25 per hour would bring the parent's annual full-time salary to \$17,160, which is still below the federal poverty level of \$17,600 for a family of three."

Cecilia Zalkind, Executive Director, Association for Children of New Jersey

“Unfortunately, the cost of living doesn’t take a vacation. Working people don’t get time off from the struggle to support their families and build a future. The pressure only gets worse, especially for those closer to the bottom than the top of the economic ladder.”

Jon Shure, President, New Jersey Policy Perspective

“In our cities not only are there more single parent families but housing, insurance, and groceries often cost more than in New Jersey’s suburbs. Many of these single parents, working at minimal wages, have to work such long hours to financially support their families they are less able to emotionally support their families.”

Cornell William Brooks, Executive Director of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice

“New Jersey is one of just two states that provide no minimum wage protections for tipped workers. As we raise the minimum wage, we also need to close this unfair loophole that leaves thousands of New Jersey’s workers in poverty.”

Raj Nayak, Staff Attorney, National Employment Law Project

“Women make up the majority of workers in low-wage jobs, and are more likely to remain in these jobs for long periods of time. An increase in the minimum wage would positively impact the lives of these women and their families throughout the state.”

Karen S. White, Director, Working Families Program, Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University

“Family Promise and its thousands of volunteers at Interfaith Hospitality Networks throughout New Jersey work each day to provide temporary shelter and support to homeless families. More often than not, our guest families include at least one adult working full time. We support the Raise the Wage Campaign and strongly urge the New Jersey Legislature and Governor Corzine to adopt its platform.”

Beatrice M. Robbio, Director of Education and Public Policy, Family Promise

“On behalf of restaurant workers nationwide, we encourage New Jersey to do the right thing and provide the thousands of workers who cook, serve and clean in New Jersey restaurants a basic standard of living to support their families.”

Saru Jayaraman, Co-Director, Restaurant Opportunities Center United

Raise the Wage Campaign Partners (as of July 1)

**American Friends Service Committee
Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Association for Children of New Jersey
Family Promise
Haiti Solidarity Network, North East
Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey
Interreligious Fellowship for the Homeless
Jubilee Interfaith Organization
National Employment Law Project
New Jersey Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now
New Jersey Citizen Action
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
New Jersey Policy Perspective
New Labor
Restaurant Opportunities Center United
Rutgers Center for Women and Work**