



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jesse Hamilton

Senator Hamilton, Senator Comrie, and Senator Panepinto call for \$15 Minimum Wage

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(Albany – March 25, 2015) Senator Jesse Hamilton (D-Brooklyn), Senator Leroy Comrie (D-Queens), and Senator Marc Panepinto (D-Buffalo) stood together and called for an immediate minimum wage increase to be put back on the table. The Senators emphasized that raising the minimum wage to a living wage only provides direct economic relief to New York's lowest earners and also spurs economic growth by enhancing purchasing power and injecting an estimated \$3.4 billion back into our local economies.

They called for the state budget to include a Minimum Wage Package that:

- - Increases the minimum wage to \$10.50 now with staggered incremental increases leading to \$15 in 2018.
- - Indexes the state's minimum wage to the rate of inflation to combat the rising cost of living and protect a consumer's purchasing power from future erosion.
- - Empowers local government to increase the minimum wage within their municipalities to help ensure appropriate local control based on their constituents' needs.

As freshman Senators from both Downstate and Upstate, their package builds upon the work of the Senate Democratic Conferences, which has been at the forefront of calling for a real increase in the state's minimum wage for years. Back during the 2013-2014 State Budget, when the current half-measure of staggered increases in the state's minimum wage were first enacted, the Senate Democratic Conference was clear that a real, meaningful increase was still necessary to help lift over 1.1 million New Yorkers out of poverty. Today, Senators Hamilton, Comrie, and Panepinto reiterated that same commitment to New York's middle class.

Senator Marc Panepinto (D-Buffalo) said: "Income inequality is the number one problem that faces our democracy in this country. Raising the minimum wage will allow hardworking New York families to make ends meet and put food on the table. In my district, the child poverty rate is at an unconscionable 50% in the City of Buffalo. Statewide, 23% of children are living in poverty. That is a 4% increase since 2010. New York's working families simply aren't benefitting enough from the economic recovery that brought us out of the great recession. Providing a livable wage to allow more people to work their way into New York's middle class is not only fiscally responsible, it is the right thing to do."

In what seemed like perfect timing and a precursor to today's press conference, Monday's Siena Poll highlighted that 74% of New Yorkers want an immediate minimum wage increase to \$10.50 and 52% support provisions to increase it even more in future years. As Senator Hamilton stated, "New Yorkers are telling us that we are on the right side of this issue."

Senator Jesse Hamilton (D-Brooklyn) went on to say: "Families in Central Brooklyn face the same affordability crisis families across New York face. For Central Brooklyn, the rapidly increasing price of housing, the increasing price of bus and subway fares, and increasing of other family expenses demonstrates the urgent need for the Fair New York Plan and the steps in the Minimum Wage Package we highlight today. We need to ensure that workers' earnings can keep pace with rising costs. We need to ensure that local leaders can set a higher minimum wage to meet the needs of their communities. And we need to ensure that workers across the state get the living wage they deserve."

The current minimum wage is set at \$8.75 an hour, which translates to \$18,000 a year – if one is fortunate enough to work full-time. While raising the minimum wage to \$10.50 and \$11.50 an hour in upstate and New York City respectively would directly benefit 1.35 million workers instantly, the Senators each repeated that more must be done to safeguard against the inevitable future battles that the rising cost of living will continue to cause. That is why the focal point of the Minimum Wage Package is tying an immediate minimum wage increase to slotted future incremental increases ending at \$15 in 2018

Senator Leroy Comrie (D-Queens) added to this and said: "This Democratic Conference is committed to making life more affordable for hundreds of thousands of struggling New Yorkers across the State. Here in Queens, 348,000 minimum-wage workers would see an average of \$110 added to their paychecks each week: dollars that add up when saving for a home, caring for a loved one or quite simply pursuing the quality of life hard-working New Yorkers have earned on their path to the middle class. I urge all members of the legislature to

join together in recognizing the importance of taking substantive, immediate action on this issue to bolster mobility for those who live, work in and support this State's economy.”

Senator Panepinto also called on Senate Republicans to “drop their opposition to helping minimum wage earners break out of the cycle of poverty by finally finding common ground with the Senate Democratic Conference in the fight for fair pay and the raise to a dignified wage.”

“Now is the time for Albany to work together, put New Yorkers first, and fight for our forgotten middle class and those struggling to get into it,” Panepinto concluded.