

PRESS RELEASE

October 2, 2015

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDER BOARD PASSES RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF INCREASING THE STATEWIDE MINIMUM WAGE TO \$15.00 AN HOUR

(Newark, NJ) – During the Wednesday, September 30, 2015, meeting of the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders, the Board unanimously passed a Resolution in support of increasing the statewide minimum wage to \$15.00 an hour. The freeholder chambers were filled with anxious supporters who spoke before the legislative body affirming their agreement with this pivotal move, as Essex County is the first county in the state to take such action. This landmark decision will no doubt, send a resounding voice to other state officials motivating them to join in urging the New Jersey State legislators and New Jersey State Governor to leverage their position and take action to implement legislation aimed at achieving this objective.

"Many people who work hard every day and still cannot afford the basic necessities in life such as food, housing, transportation, child care...," said Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake. "This is because the minimum wage is too little in comparison to the rising cost of living. How is it that the cost of everything seems to be increasing, for example, housing, utilities, tolls, taxes, a gallon of milk, or a carton of eggs... but when the topic of raising the minimum wage to a living wage is discussed, there are people who do not agree? If we cannot stop the rising cost of living, we must fight for what is right. I know first-hand how the current minimum wage hurts families, limits opportunities and can devastate communities. Under my presidency we will fight for people to have upward financial mobility."

The fight for a minimum wage of \$15.00 an hour began in 2012 with the organization of fast food establishment employees in New York City, but has since grown to include the demand for a real living wage for all employees and has taken root in communities across New Jersey and the United States. While the cost of living increases, many wages remain stagnant for the working poor, putting a strain on families and stunting their growth and progress into the middle class. This resolution proposes an increase of hourly wages for employees will increase the purchasing power of communities and strengthen the economy.

In the State of New Jersey, the current minimum wage is \$8.38 an hour and is considered a poverty wage for a single adult. Yet, three-fourths of those working at the current minimum wage are over 20 years old and the majority are sole providers for their families and children. Unfortunately, as a result of this wage, many workers and their families cannot fully participate in New Jersey's dynamic civic life or pursue the myriad education, cultural, and recreational opportunities that constitute a flourishing life because too many struggle to meet their basic household needs. The resolution also recognizes the growing disparity between the high cost of living and the current minimum wage which makes it impossible for many working families in New Jersey to afford basic necessities, such as housing, food, childcare, healthcare and transportation. The resolution further supports the right of workers to organize.

Brian Powers, Staff Representative for Communications Workers of America Local 1033 and representative for 15 Now New Jersey, spoke before the board and admonished businesses to, "Put people over profits...that will result in a better economy for everyone....the rent can't wait!" Analilia Mejia, Executive Director of New Jersey Working Families commended the Freeholder Board for taking a step toward passing fair wages in New Jersey. She reminded the audience, the current minimum wage of \$8.38 an hour, affords a person working 40 hours a week essentially only \$18 thousand dollars for the year in earnings, keeping them in poverty.

After the unanimous vote, the capacity filled room applauded and cheered in approval. Each freeholder indicated their expectations and wishes for New Jersey's people and economy. Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla reminded supporters to continue to work hard and to improve "Middle Skills" in preparation of a quality work force. Freeholder Patricia Sebold stated, "\$15 an hour is not enough" and she would like to

see action taken nationally. While Freeholder Wayne Richardson stated, “National statistics show productivity has gone through the roof, but wages have stayed stagnant. Therefore, people at the top are making a lot of money and the people at the bottom who do the majority of the work are not adequately compensated for their efforts.” Freeholder Vice President Brendan Gill concurred with his colleagues and stated, “This is simply the morally right thing to do. This resolution is part of a larger, broader movement across not only this state, but also this country...to move this agenda forward.” He further stated, “As elected officials and public servants, we are here to hopefully advance positions like this, whether we are able to legislate them or not. The Essex County Freeholder Board is behind them as they fight this fight.”

The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders is a nine-member board that serves as the legislative branch of county government with offices located on the 5th Floor at the Essex County Hall of Records, 465 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard, in Newark, New Jersey. The current members of the Board are: Britnee N. Timberlake of East Orange (President, District 3), Brendan W. Gill of Montclair (Vice President, At-Large), Rolando Bobadilla of Newark (District 1), Wayne L. Richardson of Newark (District 2), Leonard M. Luciano of West Caldwell (District 4), Cynthia D. Toro of Bloomfield (District 5), Patricia Sebold of Livingston (At-Large), Rufus I. Johnson of Newark (At-Large), and Lebbly C. Jones of Irvington (At-Large). The Clerk of the Board of Freeholders is Deborah Davis Ford, and she may be reached at 973-621-4486.

For Additional Information:

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