



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Leroy Comrie

## Senator Leroy Comrie Joins Senators Marc Panepinto and Jesse Hamilton in Calling for an Immediate Minimum Wage Increase

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*Upstate and Downstate Senators Find Common Ground in Fight to Raise the Minimum Wage as State Budget Deadline Looms*

**ALBANY, N.Y.** – With the State Budget Deadline looming, freshman Senators Leroy Comrie (D-Queens), Marc Panepinto (D-Buffalo) and Jesse Hamilton (D-Brooklyn) stood together on Wednesday, March 25th 2015 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 not only provides direct economic relief to New York's lowest earners but also spurs economic growth by enhancing purchasing power and injecting an estimated **\$3.4 billion** back into our local economies. To accomplish this, they called for the inclusion of a **Minimum Wage Package** in this state budget that accomplishes the following:

- Increases the minimum wage to \$10.50 now with staggered incremental increases leading to \$15 in 2018.
- Indexing 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.
- Empowering 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 Upstate and Downstate, their package builds upon that 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. **Senators Comrie, Panepinto and Hamilton reiterated that same commitment to New York's middle-class.**

**Senator Leroy Comrie (D-Queens) said:** This Democratic Conference is committed to making life more affordable for hundreds of thousands of struggling New Yorkers across the State. Raising the wage is an integral component of fulfilling that promise. 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 a quality of life pursuant 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 Marc Panepinto (D-Buffalo) added to this and 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 benefiting 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 Wednesday'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 increases to 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 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,” he concluded.

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*Senator Comrie represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Jamaica, Jamaica Hills, Jamaica Estates, St. Albans, Briarwood, Cambria Heights, Hollis, Laurelton, Rosedale, Springfield Gardens and Queens Village.*

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Stacey Eliuk

(718) 454-0162

SEliuk.NYSS@gmail.com