



50 Broadway, 29th Floor
New York, NY 10004
www.alignny.org

Testimony in Support: Raise the Wage Act Senate 1978A / Assembly 2204A

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My name is Tal Frieden and I work at ALIGN as the Campaign Coordinator for Raise Up NY. As a founding Steering Committee member of the Raise Up NY Coalition, ALIGN has built a powerful alliance of labor unions, grassroots organizations, and businesses in support of raising the minimum wage to over \$21.25 by 2027 and indexing it annually. ALIGN was active in the Fight for 15, as were many of the members of the Raise Up NY Coalition, who together represent almost one million and three hundred thousand workers across New York State.

Our coalition members are UAW workers manufacturing Ford F-150s in Buffalo and farmworkers planting, harvesting, and processing our food in the Finger Lakes region. They are home care workers in the Hudson Valley providing essential care to those who need it. Raise Up NY represents fast food workers across the state, 32BJ airport workers at some of the busiest airports in America, and UPS Teamsters in Long Island, who provide the logistics infrastructure that keeps our economy running. These are the workers who will see a direct impact in their wallets when we raise the minimum wage. According to the [Economic Progress Institute](#), under Senate bill 1978A and Assembly bill 2204A, 2.9 million workers would receive an

average raise of \$63 dollars per week. This increase of over \$250 per month could mean the difference between eating and heating, between a stable home and housing insecurity, or between childcare and missing work.

Workers from across the state have been sharing their stories about what this raise would mean to them. Gaby Garcia, a house cleaner in Flatbush, NY shared in a September [op-ed](#) that with this raise, she'd be able to buy her kids new backpacks, or buy meat at the grocery store. Stephanie Heslop, a union Starbucks worker in Ithaca, talked about being able to make rent without stress each month. Lucia Gomez, a Chipotle worker organizing with 32BJ, said a raise like this would help her support her parents and siblings. These are just a few of the stories of workers who are fighting for this raise.

Governor Hochul has put forward a modest proposal to index the minimum wage starting at \$15 an hour, with caps and exceptions that limit the impact of this measure. While it is important that the Governor is noting the need to raise the minimum wage, her proposal has serious faults—namely it does not first raise the minimum wage, an essential element of restoring the minimum wage's power, lost due to rising prices. Under the Governor's proposal, 900,000 workers would get an average raise of \$13 per week. Under the Raise the Wage Act, 2.9 million workers, or a third of the New York State workforce, would get an average raise of \$63 per week. The Governor's proposal leaves out two million workers, and gives those who do get a raise barely enough for a carton of eggs and a gallon of milk. Moreover, the Governor funds her proposal by reversing the historic raise that the legislature granted essential home care workers last year—freezing their wages and cutting out consumer-directed providers from wage increases. New York should not cut benefits for some workers in order to pay for raises for others—all workers need an immediate increase in the minimum wage.

Not only do workers need a raise: this policy is incredibly popular. [Polling](#) shows that 80% of voters—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents across all regions of New York—all support the Raise the Wage Act. In addition, 70% think that the minimum wage should be over \$20 an hour.

Ten years ago, fast food workers in New York City launched the Fight for 15, and New York became the first state in the nation to reach \$15 an hour. Now, in New York City, Westchester, and Long Island, that minimum wage has lost over 15% of its value, and upstate was left behind—currently at just \$14.20 an hour. We must honor the legacy of the Fight for 15 by first raising

the minimum wage across the entire state of New York, and then automatically increasing it each year to ensure it never falls behind again.

For more information or further discussion, please contact Tal Frieden, Raise Up NY Campaign Coordinator, tal@alignny.org.