



REFORM JEWISH VOICE  
OF NEW YORK STATE

Union for Reform Judaism  
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# Advocacy Month Resource Guide

Celebrate *Cheshvan* with Reform Jewish Voice of New York State, Reform Judaism's voice for social justice across the state, by planning advocacy activities for your congregation. From October 17 to November 14, Reform Jewish Voice of New York State is asking all New Yorkers to urge Governor Cuomo and the state legislature to raise the state minimum wage. Be sure to add your name to this campaign!

For more information, [please visit us online.](#)



# What is Reform Jewish Voice of New York State?

Reform Jewish Voice of New York State (RJV) is Reform Judaism's advocate for social justice across the state. RJV was formed in 2002 by volunteers from Reform synagogues throughout New York to advocate for state legislation and governmental actions that embody the principles of the Reform Jewish Movement and address the root causes of social and economic injustice, advance religious tolerance and human dignity throughout the state. We aim to educate synagogue members about critical issues facing New Yorkers and encourage individuals to take active roles in their state legislative districts.

For the past 10 years, Reform Jewish Voice has held state-wide programming including Consultations on Conscience, Advocacy Days in Albany, Legislative Breakfasts, Advocacy Shabbats, and Evenings with State Senators. In the past five years, our annual Advocacy Day in Albany has expanded tremendously. For the last three years, RJV has also sponsored a state wide Advocacy Shabbat called "And Justice For All" to heighten awareness and engage congregations in advocacy activities.

Throughout its ten-year history RJV has worked closely with powerful advocacy groups on a variety of issues including fighting for marriage equality, the protection of reproductive rights, increasing the minimum wage, calling for a moratorium on the death penalty, funding stem cell research, gaining access to affordable healthcare, ensuring access to vital nutrition programs and housing services and preserving religious liberty.

But perhaps most important, we have established ourselves as the progressive Jewish voice with our state officials. We have a Steering Committee of 18 members who geographically represent the expanse of New York State. From holding meetings with the Secretary to the Governor, the Governor's most senior aide, to lobby visits and locally sponsored events with legislators from around the state, RJV is an established member of the progressive and religious advocacy community in New York State.

*Reform Jewish Voice of New York State is a project of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, modeled after the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, D.C.*

# Legislative Update on the Minimum Wage

The Reform Jewish Movement has long been a voice for social and economic justice. As early as 1965, the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) passed a resolution entitled "[The Eradication and Amelioration of Poverty](#)" which urged the federal government to adopt measures "which would assure every man willing and able to work at a wage which makes possible a decent standard of living."

Our tradition teaches us to support the widow, to extend our hands to the downtrodden and our Scripture demands that we "speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy (Proverbs 31:9)." As Jews, we have an obligation not only to feed the hungry but also to help those in need become self-sufficient (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah).

New York State's current minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour translates into 82% of the 3 person federal poverty level. The last increase was 10 cents in July 2009, bringing New York's minimum wage up to the federal \$7.25 per hour. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver proposed increasing the NYS minimum wage to \$8.50 per hour on January 1, 2013 and to annually adjust the minimum for changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) beginning January 2014. An increase in the state minimum wage to \$8.50 an hour would put the wages of a full-time minimum wage worker at 95% of the 3-person federal poverty line.

Legislation to implement this proposal has been introduced ([A9148/S6413](#)) but no action has been taken. Speaker Silver held hearings this session but Senate Majority Leader Skelos opposes increasing the minimum wage and does not want the Senate to act on it.

At the federal level, New York Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand are co-sponsors of the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2012, legislation introduced by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, which seeks to raise the federal minimum wage, and thereby the threshold that states are required to meet, from \$7.25 to \$9.80 an hour by 2014.

Eighteen states and the District of Columbia have minimum wage levels above \$7.25. RJV is again advocating for an increase in the New York State minimum wage to \$8.50 per hour effective January 1, 2013 with annual adjustments beginning in January 2014, as a good first step towards bringing minimum wage workers above the poverty line.

## **Reform Jewish Voice Supports Increasing the Minimum Wage**

- New York State has not increased its minimum wage in 5 years.
- 18 states and the District of Columbia have minimum wage levels above New York's \$7.25
- Neighboring states New Jersey and Connecticut are also proposing to increase their minimum wages.

- \$7.25 translates to \$290 a week and \$15,080 a year.
- An increase in our state's minimum wage would benefit about 1 million people.
- The 2005 increase in the minimum wage did not diminish employment and some recent studies indicate that minimum wage increases have no impact on the number of jobs held or hours worked.
- An increase in the minimum wage puts money into the pockets of low-wage workers and increases demand for the goods and services they and their families purchase.

## Speaker and Organization Resources

**If you wish to bring in an outside speaker to discuss the importance of raising the minimum wage, consider contacting one of these organizations.**

[New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness](#) works to ensure that the state government makes smart revenue and budget balancing decisions. They are the sponsors of *GrowingTogetherNY*, a coalition of over 130 organizations ranging from the faith, labor, environmental, and consumer sectors. In total, the coalition represents over one million New Yorkers. To contact New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness, email [Ron Deutsch](#), the Executive Director or call him at (518) 452-2130 or (518) 469-6769.

[Hunger Action Network of NYS](#) is a membership organization comprised of over 200 community-based organizations and low-income individuals across New York State. Their current campaigns include: the Empire State Economic Security Campaign, which promotes raising the state minimum wage; the Community Food Security and Policy Project, which works to provide healthy and sustainable food to all New Yorkers; and the Faith and Hunger Network, which works with the faith community to address the root causes of hunger at the local, state and federal levels. Executive Director Mark Dunlea can be [reached by email](#) or phone at (212) 741-8192, ext. 5.

The [Fiscal Policy Institute](#) is a nonpartisan and nonprofit research institution committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of all New Yorkers. Contact Executive Director [Frank Mauro](#) by email or at (518) 786-3156.

[Business for a Fair Minimum Wage](#) is a coalition of business groups in favor of a federal minimum wage increase. Numerous [New York State businesses](#) have joined the national and state fight for a higher minimum wage.

Mark S. Jaffe, the President and CEO of the [Greater New York Chamber of Commerce](#) [stated](#), “A minimum wage increase will improve our business climate, not hurt it.” The Greater New York Chamber of Commerce represents 25,000 leaders in the public and private sectors. Joining with Mark Jaffe in calling for an increase in the state minimum wage are New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and [thousands of businesses](#) across the country, as well as [many in New York State](#). The office of the Greater New York Chamber of Commerce can be reached at (212) 686-7220 and [Mark Jaffe](#) can be reached by email.

The [New York State AFL-CIO](#) is a member of the national AFL-CIO and boasts over 2.5 million member across New York. Their legislative campaigns include raising the minimum wage, ensuring paid family leave and child care, education, workplace health and safety and mass transit to name a few. To learn more about the issues the AFL-CIO works on, [visit their blog](#). You can contact either [Mike Neidl](#) or [Ryan Delgado](#) in the Legislative Department or [Angela Blue](#) or [Fareed Michelen](#) in the Community Outreach Department. The NYS AFL-CIO offices can also be reached at (212) 777-6040 or (518) 463-8516.

[Strong Economy for All](#) works with city, local, and state officials to ensure that public and private policies benefit low-income, working middle-class New Yorkers. They focus on raising the minimum wage, supporting policies that spur job creation and removing corporate money from elections. [Michael Kink](#), the Executive Director, can be reached at (646) 820-7332.

## Take Action Online

1. Visit [www.rjvnys.org](http://www.rjvnys.org) and click on "Take Action to Raise the Minimum Wage."
2. Follow the link to the Action Alert page.
3. Fill in your zip code and your street address if prompted.
4. Fill in the form to send the following letter to Gov. Cuomo and your state Senator.

Dear Gov. Cuomo/Sen. XYZ,

As a member of the Reform Jewish Voice of New York State, a constituent and a supporter of raising the minimum wage, I am writing to you because I want New York State to join 18 other states and the District of Columbia in requiring a minimum wage that helps bring New Yorkers out of poverty.

It has been the longstanding position of the Reform Jewish Movement that we "speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy (Proverbs 1:9)." As Jews, we have an obligation not only to feed the hungry but also to help those in need become self-sufficient (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah).

Eighteen states and the District of Columbia have minimum wage levels above \$7.25 according to a recent report by the Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI). An increase in the state minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$8.50 an hour would put the wages of a full-time minimum wage worker at 95% of the 3-person federal poverty line.

We ask you to urge Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos to consider legislation (**A9148/S6413**) to raise the minimum wage to ensure that all New Yorkers have the ability to succeed in today's economy.

Sincerely,  
Your Name

# So You Want to Meet Your Legislator?

## **1. Contacting your legislator.**

Visit the [New York State Senate](#) website or the [New York State Assembly](#) website to look up your legislator. Follow the link to your state Senator or Assembly member's homepage. By selecting the "Contact" tab, you will be directed to their office locations and phone number.

## **2. Make your appointment well in advance.**

Legislators, especially during the legislative session, have very busy schedules. They are generally at home (in their district offices) from Thursday afternoon through Monday morning (including weekends) and meetings can be made during those times. But call early, for it might be difficult finding a time that suits both their schedule and yours. Once you have made the appointment, send information letting them know what you'll be discussing and what position you want them to take.

## **3. Determine what you want to accomplish in the meeting.**

An oral statement of support from legislators is not enough. Make a list of what you want them to do. This might include co-sponsoring a bill, voting for a bill in committee, voting for it on the floor or pushing to get a bill to the floor or opposing such measures. Pushing a bill on the floor is often important when your Senator is a Republican or your Assembly Member is a Democrat since the majority party has absolute control over what does or does not make it to the floor. It is very easy for legislators to assuage constituents by giving them a pledge of support (or a promise to vote for a bill on the floor) knowing that the bill will never see the light of day.

## **4. Make your case in a short and persuasive manner.**

Be sure to bring along another copy of any background material. Chances are that your legislators will not have spent much time with the copy you send them beforehand. Let them know that you are a constituent, that you are representing Reform Jewish Voice in New York State, which is a coalition of the Reform congregations in New York, and that we are the largest segment of the Jewish population.

Always have an "ask." If they don't respond clearly and unambiguously, pin them down. Legislators often use vague or ambiguous replies to avoid telling constituents that they aren't voting the way the constituent wants. If the legislator is in the majority, strongly convey the fact that you are counting on him/her to ensure that the legislation passes his or her house.

If the legislator agrees with our position, ask on which of his or her colleagues we should be focusing our attention to get more votes. This is an opportunity to parlay a visit to a friendly legislator into information that can help another congregation focus on undecided or “swing” legislators.

## **5. Follow up the meeting.**

This can be in the form of a letter or an email. Thank your legislators for their time and, if they agreed to assist with something, restate their promise. This makes it more likely that they will follow through.

If they have made a promise, follow up again in an appropriate time (this can range from a week to several weeks) and ask what they have done. Each subsequent contact reinforces in their mind the seriousness with which you and the Reform Movement take their commitment and makes it more likely that they will follow through.

**Want to know more? Check out these articles!**

[“Speak Up New York”](#) (RACblog)

[“NY Leaders Speak Out for a Fair Minimum Wage”](#) (RACblog)

[“NY Legislative Session Close to the End”](#) (RACblog)

[“New York Teeters on Minimum Wage Deal”](#) (RACblog)

[“New York must finally raise minimum wage”](#), (NY Daily News, joint Op-Ed written by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver)

[“Key Facts on New York’s Minimum Wage”](#), (Raise the Minimum Wage Campaign)

[“Hardworking Americans should not be living in poverty”](#), (CNN)

[“Now, Not Later: Increasing New York State’s Minimum Wage”](#), (Huffington Post)

[“Raising Minimum Wage: A Help or Harm?”](#), (NPR)