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November 19, 2012

Dear Members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee:

### **Statement in Support of S-3 (Sweeney / Vitale / Codey) & A-2162 (Oliver / Greenwald) Raises the Minimum Wage**

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO is proud that legislative leaders in both houses of the New Jersey Legislature - Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver, are passionate advocates of raising the state's minimum wage. In a high cost of living state such as ours, it is quite obvious that our current minimum wage is inadequate and needs to be corrected for the benefit of low income workers.

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO's goal on this issue is a simple one - we support the most comprehensive, long term solution possible. To achieve this goal, a COLA must be included. The reasons for a COLA are basic - it's a permanent "fix" for low income workers due to the continuous erosion by inflation and it removes politics from the minimum wage issue in the future. It is our belief that low income workers should not suffer due to the volatility of the partisan environment inherent to our policy making process. It should be noted that COLA's have been passed in 10 states. The bill before you today removes politics from the equation and remedies this issue once and for all on behalf of low income workers by including a COLA.

At its core, raising the minimum wage is an anti-poverty measure. New Jersey's growing poverty statistics are startling and raising the minimum wage would be a strong first step toward addressing this problem. According to the Census Bureau, from 2007 - 2011, 63,322 children and 33,202 families in New Jersey have fallen into poverty, an increase of 28% and 24% respectively. The costs of health care, education, food, gas, electricity, and transportation are all escalating drastically, while the minimum wage is held at poverty level wages. This needs to change.

In closing, the New Jersey State AFL-CIO believes that with honest work should come dignity and we have the opportunity to take a significant step forward in obtaining that for New Jersey's low income workers by passing this legislation.

Sincerely,

Charles Wowkanech  
President

Laurel Brennan  
Secretary-Treasurer

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