



Board of Directors

January 30, 2024

Stuart Appelbaum
President,

Retail, Wholesale and
Department Store Union

Hon. Liz Krueger, Chair
New York State Senate Finance Committee
416 Capitol, Albany, NY 12247

Eddie Bautista

Executive Director,
NYC Environmental Justice
Alliance

Hon. Helene E. Weinstein, Chair
New York State Assembly Ways & Means Committee
LOB 923, Albany, NY 12248

Henry Garrido

Executive Director,
AFSCME District Council 37

Hon. Jessica Ramos, Chair
New York State Senate Labor Committee

Lucia Gomez

Political & Legislative Director,
New York Central Labor
Council

Hon. Harry Bronson, Chair
New York State Assembly Labor Committee

Bernadette Kelly

Executive Vice President,
Consortium for Worker
Education

My name is Theodore A. Moore, and I am the Executive Director of ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York. We bring together labor, climate, and community for a more just and sustainable New York, and I'm here as a leader in two coalitions fighting for better conditions for our state's workers. Thank you to the Labor Committees and Chairs Senator Ramos and Assemblymember Bronson, and Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Weinstein for the opportunity to speak today.

Jose Lopez

Co-Executive Director,
Make the Road New York

As a founding member of the Raise Up NY coalition, ALIGN has built a powerful alliance of labor unions, grassroots organizations, and businesses supporting underpaid workers in their fight for fair wages. Last year, we fought hard to get workers a raise. The cost of living had skyrocketed, while the value of a paycheck bought less and less. The final legislation was an important first step in this fight, but several provisions of the law will actually harm workers trying to make ends meet.

Cynthia Travieso

Political Director,
Community Voices Heard

ALIGN supports the Upstate Parity and Minimum Wage Protection Act, which takes key steps to make the current law better for workers and the economy. The current law increases the minimum wage to \$17 an hour downstate and \$16 upstate by 2026. By setting the upstate wage lower than downstate's, we ignore that regions from Ithaca to Rochester to the Hudson Valley are experiencing soaring housing and living costs just like downstate. The Act would establish a statewide minimum wage of \$17 by 2026, ensuring \$17 is the floor and upstate workers don't get left behind.

Zachary Lerner

Deputy Executive Director,
New York Communities
for Change

The current law also contains a harmful loophole that automatically denies workers a raise in years of increased unemployment. New York was once a leader – the first

state to set a \$15 minimum wage. But here we are an outlier; of 19 states that index the minimum wage to inflation, we are one of two maintaining a loophole of this kind.¹ If the loophole is triggered in 2027, nearly 2 million low-wage workers would lose out on a raise. Workers can't afford a raise with fine print. Higher wages are good for workers and the economy,² and both workers and businesses will benefit from a just minimum wage. The Upstate Parity & Minimum Wage Protection Act would eliminate this harmful loophole. We encourage the committee to support this legislation and prioritize it in the 2024 State Budget.

But just paying workers a fair wage isn't enough; New York must keep workers safe on the job, and our state is facing a worker injury crisis. The New York State Department of Labor projects that the warehouse industry will grow faster than any other in the state between 2018 and 2028. At the same time, warehouse workers are injured four times more often than the average New York worker. As e-commerce continues to grow, this crisis does too. ALIGN supports the Warehouse Worker Injury Reduction Act, to ensure that warehouses are designed for worker safety.

Lifting and twisting with heavy boxes and repeating awkward motions can cause serious injuries like muscle strains, sprains, and tendonitis. And in most cases, workers miss time or need a job transfer. These warehouses are being designed for profit and to get products out quickly, not for human bodies.

Just 15 minutes from here is Amazon's ALB1 distribution center in Schodack, NY. It's one of Amazon's biggest warehouses in the state, with nearly 1,000 full-time workers. It's also one of the most dangerous, with nearly one in five workers getting injured every year.³ These injuries can have lifelong impacts on worker health while employers experience high turnover and New York's healthcare and workers' comp⁴ systems are further burdened.

The Warehouse Worker Injury Reduction Act would require warehouses to be designed for safety first, with mandated annual evaluations by ergonomics experts to identify hazards and assign fixes. Fixes may be simple, such as providing dollies for heavy loads or raising a shelf so that workers don't have to bend over repeatedly. It would also provide for better worker training, improved on-site medical care, and consistent safety standards across the industry.

We're advocating for \$5 million in the NYS budget to implement and enforce the Act, because the urgency of the crisis demands action now. We must empower the Department of Labor to hold warehouse employers accountable for injuries and ensure workers have safe conditions on the job.

¹ <https://www.nelp.org/blog/new-yorks-minimum-wage-law-has-a-loophole-that-could-freeze-increases-starting-in-2027/>

² <https://irle.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/High-Minimum-Wages-and-the-Monopsony-Puzzle.pdf>

³ <https://alignny.org/press/nys-most-dangerous-warehouse-is-15-minutes-from-state-capitol-with-nearly-1-serious-injury-for-every-5-workers/>

⁴ <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/because-of-injury-claims-state-wants-amazons-automated-warehouses-to-pay-higher-workers-comp-premiums-than-meatpacking-or-logging-operations/>

We urge the committee to support the Upstate Parity & Minimum Wage Protection Act and the Warehouse Worker Injury Reduction Act in the budget. Thank you.