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February 13, 2026

Board of
Directors

ALIGN Testimony for Joint Legislative Budget Hearing, Labor Committee

Stuart
Appelbaum
President,
Retail
Wholesale
Department
Store Union

Thank you Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and all the members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the SFY 26-27 State Budget. And additional thanks to Senate Labor Chair Ramos and Assembly Chair Bronson for your continued championing of labor issues and your partnership. ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York is a longstanding alliance of labor and community organizations united for a just and sustainable New York. We build coalitions with those most impacted and uplift worker and community voices to fight for dignity in the workplace and a just path to a renewable energy economy for all.

Henry Garrido
*Executive
Director,*
AFSCME
District Council
37

Lucia Gomez,
*Political
Director,*
NYC Central
Labor Council

New York has made historic commitments to working people. The task before us now is to make those commitments a reality. ALIGN urges the Legislature to fully fund and fully implement the worker protection laws you have already passed, including the Warehouse Worker Injury Reduction Act, the Retail Worker Safety Act, and other hard-won workplace safety reforms, as well as ensure the Department of Labor (DOL) has the staffing and enforcement capacity necessary to keep workers safe across New York State.

Bernadette
Kelly,
Consortium for
Worker
Education

Turn Worker Protection Laws into Practice: Implementing Recently Passed Legislation and Funding the Department of Labor

Eunice Ko
*Deputy
Director,*
NYC
Environmental
Justice
Alliance

In recent years, the Legislature has passed critical protections responding to rising workplace violence, injury rates, and exploitative production quotas.

Olivia Leirer
Co-Director,
New York
Communities
for Change

The Retail Worker Safety Act addresses escalating violence and harassment facing frontline retail workers. The Warehouse Worker Injury Reduction Act tackles high injury rates in logistics facilities, an industry that has expanded rapidly across the state and requires rigorous regulation to mitigate the hazards workers within the industry face. These were necessary responses to documented harm: Warehouse worker injuries in New York state increased by 30% between 2022 and 2023—equivalent to more than one injury for every 9 warehouse workers each year—and the state's warehouse worker injury rate is more than double the national average.¹

Juanita O.
Lewis

1

https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.nelp.org/new-data-show-warehouse-injuries-in-new-york-skyrocketing-as-jobs-in-the-sector-continue-to-grow/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1770935269629810&usg=AOvVaw2rdr6OMb8X_s4RCd-Rn7ip



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*Executive
Director
Community
Voices Heard*

Jose Lopez
*Co-Executive
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The passage of these laws without sufficient corresponding enforcement renders them promises without protection. In order to be effective, these statutes require clear and timely rulemaking, dedicated enforcement staff, robust complaint investigation capacity, multilingual outreach and worker education, data collection and public reporting, and more. Without adequate funding for DOL inspectors, investigators, and compliance officers, these laws will not achieve their intended impact.

New York's workforce is more than 9 million strong,² yet the number of workplace safety inspectors and labor standards investigators remains insufficient to meaningfully deter violations across industries. Workers cannot rely solely on complaint-driven enforcement, particularly in sectors where retaliation is common even despite legislation to combat it, and fear is real.

The Department of Labor plays a central role not only in enforcing the aforementioned laws and investigating workplace safety complaints, but also holds a variety of other important responsibilities such as protecting immigrant and low-wage workers, supporting workforce development and job placement, overseeing unemployment insurance, and much more. And as the economy shifts through automation, warehouse expansion, extreme heat and climate transition, enforcement demands are increasing. The DOL needs increased funding for enforcement staff, including labor standards investigators and safety inspectors. Strong enforcement levels the playing field for responsible employers and prevents a race to the bottom.

Full implementation of the Retail Worker Safety Act, the Warehouse Worker Injury Reduction Act, and other recent reforms will only succeed if the Department of Labor has the resources to enforce them.

Safe workplaces are foundational to economic stability. Workplace injuries increase healthcare costs, disrupt families, reduce productivity, and shift burdens onto public systems.³ ⁴ Wage theft drains billions from workers and communities each year.⁵ Violence and unsafe quotas cause long-term physical and psychological harm.⁶ When the state enforces labor standards, responsible employers are not undercut by bad actors, workers are able to support their families, public health improves, and economic inequality narrows.

² <https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.ny.htm>

³ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/workplace-injuries-in-a-changing-labor-market/>

⁴

<https://www.aha.org/press-releases/2025-06-02-new-aha-report-finds-workplace-and-community-violence-cost-hospitals-more-18-billion-annually>

⁵ <https://www.nywagetheft.com/>

⁶ <https://healthcareworkforce.org/news/new-aha-report-violence-costs-hospitals-18-27-billion-in-2023>



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Full implementation is immediately necessary, and it requires investment. **We urge the Legislature to ensure the implementation of the Retail Worker Safety Act, the Warehouse Worker Injury Reduction Act, and other recently passed worker protection laws, and provide the full funding necessary for the Department of Labor to keep workers protected across New York State.**

Implement Programmatic Funding Sources: Progressive Income Tax and Cap & Invest.

New York faces real fiscal pressures, but budget gaps should not be balanced on the backs of working families or by underfunding enforcement. There are responsible revenue options that both generate resources and advance equity:

1. **A progressive income tax structure.** New York's tax system has become less progressive over time, even as income inequality has deepened. A modest increase on ultra-high earners would raise substantial recurring revenue; reduce structural deficits; protect investments in labor enforcement and worker protections; and strengthen the state's ability to fund childcare, workforce development, and public services. Top earners have seen disproportionate income growth. Asking them to contribute slightly more is both fiscally responsible and economically sound.
2. **Full implementation of Cap & Invest.** The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) commits New York to bold climate action. The proposed Cap & Invest program is designed to price pollution, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and generate significant revenue for reinvestment. Full implementation of the Cap & Invest program would create good-paying jobs in clean energy, building retrofits, and infrastructure; fund workforce development programs for displaced and transitioning workers; support frontline communities disproportionately burdened by pollution; generate recurring revenue that can support public services, including labor enforcement.

Climate policy and labor policy are not separate conversations. A well-designed Cap & Invest program can strengthen both worker protections and economic opportunity, particularly if revenues are directed toward union jobs, apprenticeship pathways, and high-road employers.

Delaying or weakening implementation would forgo critical revenue and slow job creation.



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The Legislature has taken courageous steps to protect working people. Now is the time to match those commitments with funding. We respectfully urge the committee to:

- Fully fund DOL enforcement and implementation of new worker safety laws
- Invest in staffing and sector-specific enforcement capacity
- Enact progressive revenue measures, including a more progressive income tax
- Fully implement Cap & Invest to generate climate-aligned revenue and good jobs

New York can lead the nation in building an economy that is safe, fair, and sustainable, but only if we ensure that the laws we pass are meaningfully enforced.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Theodore A. Moore
Executive Director