

Group advocating for N.J. businesses spending big to fight \$15 minimum wage

By [KATHERINE LANDERGAN](#)
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A recently formed group advocating for "thousands" of New Jersey businesses has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars since September fighting efforts to raise the statewide minimum wage to \$15.

"We can't afford extreme wage mandates that will raise prices on household items and services, kill jobs, and force local businesses to close," the group, called Protect Jersey Jobs, states [on its website](#). "A \$15 minimum wage is nothing more than a minimum wage mandate against New Jersey businesses."

Protect Jersey Jobs was formed in September and, according to spokeswoman Jeanette Hoffman, includes groups like the New Jersey Food Council, the National Federation of Independent Business and the New Jersey Gasoline-Convenience-Automotive Association. Hoffman said the coalition represents "thousands" of businesses, though she could not provide an exact number.

The group's effort comes as Democratic leaders in both chambers of the state Legislature, as well as Democratic Gov.-elect Phil Murphy, have [committed to raising the minimum wage](#) to \$15 an hour over a period of years. All three Democrats acknowledge that many details still need to be worked out, including how long it would take to reach the \$15 threshold and whether to create exemptions for certain industries, like farm workers.

The state's current minimum wage of \$8.44 an hour is set to increase to \$8.60 on Jan. 1.

Hoffman said that Protect Jersey Jobs has run radio ads on 101.5 FM, and a television spot on Fox and CNN. It has also sent out four mailers and has posted ads on social media, on political websites and in newspapers across New Jersey.

Hoffman declined to say how much money Protect Jersey Jobs has spent to date, but that it was "significant."

However, according to Advertising Analytics, a group that tracks ad buys, Protect Jersey Jobs spent approximately \$274,000 on the cable ads and about \$118,000 on radio ads from the end of October through early November.

The group is not a political organization and doesn't support or oppose candidates for office, Hoffman said.

“It’s strictly an education and advocacy campaign to inform New Jersey’s overtaxed residents about the negative economic impact of wage mandate proposals,” she said in a statement. “We hope political leaders from both sides of the aisle will work with businesses to create a New Jersey economy that is stable, secure, and strong.”

Protect Jersey Jobs characterizes the potential minimum wage hike as a “wage mandate,” a term Hoffman said was selected because “it’s government mandating an employers’ pay and the cost of labor.

“It’s applying a one-size-fits-all mandate on businesses that operate in very different circumstances,” she said. “A small dry cleaner is going to operate much differently than a national retail chain.”

According to the group's website, "wages should be decided between workers and their employers."

The minimum wage bill is expected to be aggressively lobbied on in Trenton next year. Many labor groups will argue a \$15 minimum wage is necessary not only for the livelihood of workers, but for the economy. One in four workers in the state would receive a pay increase, [according to the left-leaning think tank](#) New Jersey Policy Perspective.

Two of the heavyweights that represent the state's business community — the New Jersey Business & Industry Association and the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce — both say they are not involved in the Protect Jersey Jobs campaign.

Tom Bracken, president and CEO of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, said his group is not opposed to raising the minimum wage if it is done in a way that won't be damaging to businesses. “We’ve said from Day One we are willing to talk about something that’s reasonable with regard to increasing the minimum wage,” Bracken said in a phone interview. “Not immediately or in two years, but if there is a path to get there without any dramatic impact on businesses and employment.”

Bob Considine, a spokesperson for NJBIA, said in an email that the association's lack of involvement is nothing against the campaign, but that “we’re just focusing on a proactive agenda for workforce development and raising the skill sets of entry level workers as part of the conversation on the \$15 minimum wage.”

On its website, Protect Jersey Jobs states the hike would be a nearly “80 percent increase” over the current wage and links to studies that say a \$15 minimum wage would eliminate jobs and result in income loss.

The website features a video from a business owner in South Jersey who says a \$15 minimum wage could force him to lay off workers.

“If Trenton politicians have their way, and pass these mandates, I’m concerned I would have to cut employee hours or their jobs,” said Joe Olivo, president of a printing company in Moorestown. “That’s one of the ironies that I see in all of this — is that the people they are trying to help are actually going to be most hurt.”