



NJ Assembly Committee approves \$15 minimum wage

By: Dave Madden, January 24, 2019

TRENTON, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — New Jersey's bid for a \$15 an hour minimum wage by 2024 has cleared an assembly committee on a largely partisan vote with Democrats in favor and Republicans against it.

Some three dozen people on both sides of the question made impassioned pleas to the Assembly Labor Committee over almost four hours.

Brian Coolis, a disabled restaurant worker, broke down as he discussed the need for the increase.

"How is it I can have food stamps, how is it I can have a rental subsidy, I can have a disability but my refrigerator is still empty?" Coolis testified. "And I'm not buying anything that is a luxury. I'm just buying basic needs.

Sal Risalvato of the state's Gasoline Retailers Association followed and sympathized with those like Coolis, but added he could present his own stories of pain from the other side of the issue.

"I could bring up a number of small business owners who have put their home at risk to get a second mortgage to put a down payment on a business, and work hundreds of hours beyond what their employees work just to make those payments and put a little something on their family's tables as well," Risalvato said.

Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin helped draw up the accord with the Senate and the Murphy administration over several months, and concedes it's not perfect.

“No New Jerseyan working full time should be living in poverty,” he said, “and I think if you pass this bill out of committee, we’ll take the next step in making sure that doesn’t occur.”

Supporters pointed out the need, even as they found problems with the legislation. Businesses talked of their own concerns, mostly over costs.

“We’re not naive to think that the minimum wage is not going to be increased,” Tom Bracken, president of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, testified. “But the slower the rate of the increase and the more exemptions, the less impact it will have on the negative unintended consequences.”

The measure will next go to the Assembly Appropriations Committee for a hearing on Monday.

Proponents want to get this in place for the first step to \$10 an hour on July 1.