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Farmworker Justice Asks New Jersey Governor Murphy to Reject the Minimum Wage Legislation's Discrimination Against Farmworkers

Farmworker Justice criticized today's votes in the New Jersey Assembly and Senate on excluding farmworkers from the legislation that would guarantee a gradual rise in the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Under the bill, farmworkers are not treated like most other workers who would receive the \$15 minimum wage by 2024. Nor are they treated like the small-business's employees or seasonal workers whose minimum wage will rise to \$15 by 2026. Farm operators, no matter how large, would only need to pay their farmworkers \$12.50 an hour by 2024. After that government officials would decide how farmworkers are treated.

"The Governor should send the legislation back and tell the politicians to treat farmworkers equally with other workers. They work in a dangerous job to put food on our tables. Inflicting sub-poverty wages on farmworker families for the next five years is unconscionable," said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice, a national advocacy organization.

New Jersey's minimum wage law hasn't been discriminating recently and shouldn't start now.

The proposed compromise is out of step with the labor market, even for this low-paid occupation. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Labor Survey of field and livestock workers, in the region that includes New Jersey (along with Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania), the average wage for farmworkers during 2018 was \$13.15 per hour. Yet, five years from now, the pending proposal would set the minimum wage for farmworkers at a mere \$12.50 an hour.

A low minimum wage also harms many law-abiding, reasonable agricultural businesses that are trying to do the right thing by treating farmworkers with respect and compensating them fairly but compete against low-road businesses.

Goldstein added, "New Jersey's elected leaders should demonstrate respect for the valuable role played by farmworkers who feed us and should not deprive

farmworkers of the same rights as other workers. Farmworkers should have the same access to a guaranteed \$15 minimum wage as other workers.”