

SUMMING UP:

Promoting Jobs and Economic Growth for All New Jerseyans

New Jerseyans of all backgrounds could realize widespread economic well-being if assertive public policies are undertaken to help them find and keep rewarding work — and help the state maximize competitive advantages that include location, top higher education institutions, an extensive (if fraying) transportation network, and the ability to attract striving immigrants.

Today, disparities in earning power and economic security prevent New Jersey from achieving and sustaining the growth needed to keep it an attractive place to raise a family, start a business, and build future economic security. And, like the rest of the nation, New Jersey faces a future of new jobs likely to pay less than the jobs they replace. These jobs can still be the first rungs of the ladder into the middle class for many people if wages keep up with living costs. Without supportive public policy decisions, these jobs will be dead ends.

A three-pronged approach is required:

- Reduce structural barriers to opportunity
- Increase public investment in small businesses
- Help New Jerseyans gain the education and skills needed for a good job

Key Recommendations

Widen the path to economic security: improving compensation and benefits so that hard-working New Jerseyans can be more economically self-sufficient, and removing policies that make it difficult for qualified workers to be hired into the jobs they need to support themselves and their families.

Necessary steps include:

- Make the minimum wage in New Jersey a “livable wage” by mandating a pay level linked to the cost of meeting basic needs.
- Give all employees the right to a specified number of sick leave days they can take off with pay.
- Improve family leave by increasing wage replacement, increasing leave time, and better promoting awareness.

- Strengthen protections against wage theft so employees receive the pay they have earned.
- Strengthen existing law by allowing employers to inquire about an applicant's criminal record and complete a background check *only* after making a conditional job offer.
- Expand availability of New Jersey driver's licenses to all residents meeting age and skill qualification, regardless of immigration status.

Develop more on-ramps to business growth: nurturing small businesses, which create two-thirds of New Jersey's new jobs, and cultivating state economic development support for home-grown innovation, and job creation.

- Create ways to help universities move applied research to market.
- Propel small business development by organizing investor networks, linking entrepreneurs with mentors, and training business owners.
- Encourage cities and counties to adopt Responsible Banking Ordinances that require financial institutions doing business with a government jurisdiction to invest in and serve the community equitably.
- Include small business representation on the state Economic Development Authority's public board.

Help all New Jerseyans acquire skills that will be in demand for good jobs in the coming years.

- Make greater efforts to increase high school and college completion rates and expand state financial aid to undocumented students.
- Focus job-support resources on chronically unemployed youth, low-paid workers, people with disabilities, veterans, and the long-term jobless.
- Provide all unemployment insurance recipients with job-search assistance and coaching during the early stages of joblessness.
- Focus workforce development programs on on-the-job training for industry-certified credentials, and make public funding of community college-based training for the unemployed available only when the curriculum leads to credentials endorsed by groups of private employers.
- Follow the lead of other states to expand and enrich high-quality, Internet-based platforms to deliver workforce development and reemployment services.

Promoting Jobs and Economic Growth for All New Jerseyans is one of seven reports in the *Crossroads NJ* series produced by The Fund for New Jersey to inform debate in this pivotal election year. The full text of the reports and other information about *Crossroads NJ* are available at www.fundfornj.org/crossroadsnj.

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