

Economic Justice

Outrage over the plight of people living in poverty is a theme throughout our ancient, sacred texts. “The poor” are those who live precariously between subsistence and utter deprivation. It is not poor people themselves who are the problem, but their lack of access to the necessities of life. Without such, our neighbors cannot maintain their human dignity.

Strong themes in our Holy text indicate that people are poor because of circumstances that have afflicted them (such as “aliens, orphans, widows”), or because of the greed and unjust practices of those who “trample on the poor” (Amos 5:11). The prophet rails against those “who write oppressive statutes to turn aside the needy from justice” (Isaiah 10:1-2).

Poverty is a problem of the whole human community, not only of those who are poor or vulnerable.

An economy (oikonomia or “management of the household”) is meant to meet people’s material needs. The current market-based economy does that to an amazing degree; many New Jerseyans are prospering as never before. While at the same time, many continue to lack what they need for basic subsistence, a home, meaningful work, health care and healthy food. New Jersey’s economy has grown over the past 6 years, but are we good managers of this household? According to the Dept of Labor, employment in New Jersey has grown at an annualized rate of 1.6% over the five years to 2023, over performing the national average of 1.2%. The Minimum wage increase to \$15.00 an hour was a strong step, and yet we must do more for our neighbors who continue to struggle to make ends meet each month.

New Jersey's unemployment rate is 3.9% in 2023, which ranks it 39th out of 50 states. New Jersey's unemployment rate has trended downwards, outperforming the US economy as a whole. These solid employment trends indicate the health of our labor markets, indicating an overall strength of our economy. These data signal the need to continue to move ahead with another minimum wage increase. Now is the time to move minimum wage to \$18.00 an hour in New Jersey. Our economy is growing, business in New Jersey is strong and doing well, but our neighbors are being left behind.

A Corporate Business Tax on the largest and wealthiest corporations in New Jersey will help to support NJ Transit and we support this measure. A fair and strong economy in New Jersey depends on a functioning transit system that ensures affordable access to jobs, education, and healthcare options for all residents. NJ Transit is an economic

driver, not a financial liability now is the time for New Jersey to leverage this vital asset to make our state more equitable, more sustainable, and less car dependent. And we must stop drastic fare hikes for NJ Transit riders. NJ Transit's budget should never be balanced on the backs of riders who are often low wage workers.

Climate, and economic justice requires an aggressive commitment to transit affordability and reliable service for all riders whether they ride the bus or the rails. The wealthiest corporations who benefit from this robust transit system should continue to contribute more to the system. A vibrant, electrified public transit system is critical to fight climate change and keeping New Jersey economically competitive.

As people of faith, we are sent out to advocate for just economic policies, and an economy that is structured for the good of all. God's vision expands our vision and transforms our political priorities. We do not eat alone; everyone eats together; we are neighbors not strangers. We are committed to tend to New Jersey's household to advance the common good.

Questions:

1. Realizing that the creation of a dedicated fund for NJ transit changes the fiscal outlook for NJ Transit, will you support the elimination of the double digit increase in NJ Transit?
2. Will you join us in working for an increase in the minimum wage to \$18.00 an hour so that all New Jerseyans can thrive, most especially our brother and sisters who work for low wages?