



## The Budget is a Moral Document!

### Who We Are:

**The Pennsylvania Religious Action Center represents 40,000 Jews at 40 Reform congregations across 25 counties in PA.** The RAC has been the Reform Movement's social justice arm in state and federal politics for over 60 years, bringing our Jewish values to life through policies that promote peace and wholeness (*shalom*), justice and equity (*tzedek*), and belonging and joy (*shayachut* and *simcha*). We are inspired to act together for change by the words of our sages who said: "you are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it (*Pirkei Avot* 2:16).

### Why We're Here:

**Right now, Pennsylvanians have a unique opportunity to influence their lawmakers.** While last session was one of the least productive in PA history, the results of the previous federal election have given state lawmakers a renewed urgency to act in 2025. In the next few months while the state budget is negotiated, we will have the opportunity to advance policies that align with our vision of *tikkun olam*. The PA budget is a moral document that reflects our shared values and commitments. With your help, we can make sure our next budget uplifts our families and communities.

### What We Can Do:

We're asking you to rise up in this critical moment by **engaging your representatives through in-district meetings, where you can express your Reform Jewish values in support of just clean energy, minimum wage, and public education policies.**

# Public Education

## Background

In 2023, the Commonwealth Court ruled that Pennsylvania's public school funding system was unconstitutional. Following that ruling, The Basic Education Funding Commission exposed a staggering \$5.4 billion funding gap which is what we are seeking to address. **After decades of discriminatory underfunding, we now have an opportunity to set our children up for success by pushing for adequate funding throughout our public school system.** As Jews, we must make certain that Pennsylvania lawmakers recognize their moral and constitutional responsibility to improve our schools and give our kids a fair opportunity.

## What Are We Asking?

**We're calling on our lawmakers to pass legislation that immediately increases adequacy funding by \$1 billion each year for the next 4 years to achieve full public school funding by the 2028-2029 school year.** We're asking for their commitment to use our tax dollars to fix our unconstitutional public education system, not to subsidize private schools.

## What Are Our Values?

The Jewish People have always honored education as a means for personal, spiritual, and community enrichment. Our long history of scholarship guides our pursuit of justice, helping us recognize the critical role education plays in a fulfilled life. **In our central *V'ahavta* prayer, we sanctify our roles as stewards of the next generation, responsible for diligently educating our children about the teachings of God (Deut. 6:7).** As part of our collective duty to raise the next generation, we must make sure that equal access to quality education is a right that is passed down *l'dor vador*.

## Talking Points

- Access to good education is a core Jewish value.
- Each child in Pennsylvania deserves to go to a public school that receives the funding it needs, regardless of race, economic class or geography.
- Fair funding for each child in each district is a moral imperative.

# Minimum Wage

## What Are We Asking?

In order to support 1.3 million minimum-wage workers in PA, **we are asking our lawmakers to support H.B. 1150 & S.B. 19, to raise the state minimum wage to \$15/hour beginning January 1, 2026.** This bill would also ensure that the minimum wage will be increased with a cost-of-living adjustment beginning January 1, 2027, and each year thereafter. This bill would also strengthen worker protections to prevent wage theft and give municipalities the ability to set a higher minimum wage.

## What Are Our Values?

For Reform Jews, pursuing economic justice is not a matter of charity, but of collective responsibility. **Our sacred texts stress our obligation to “champion the poor and the needy” (Prov. 31:9), recognizing that “if all the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other, poverty would outweigh them all” (Midrash Exodus Rabbah 31:12).** For millennia, Jews have known that doing so means protecting workers’ rights and ensuring fair wages and working conditions. Our sages laid out explicit rules to guarantee that laborers earned a livable wage, on the principle that, **“whoever withholds an employee’s wages, it is as though he has taken the person’s life (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 83a).** Together, we must lift up the vulnerable to ensure that all members of our communities have access to a dignified life.

## Talking Points

- **Pennsylvania’s minimum wage is not a living wage.**
- Despite skyrocketing costs of living, the PA minimum wage has been frozen at an immoral \$7.25/hour – the federal baseline – since 2006.
- Coming out to \$15,080/year, a full-time minimum wage worker is condemned to live in severe poverty. These hardworking Pennsylvanians face enduring challenges meeting their critical human needs, including accessing food, housing, physical and mental healthcare, childcare, and education.
- In the 19 years since the minimum wage was raised to \$7.25/hour, the relative value of this scant sum has cratered by more than 30%.
- The cost of living in PA has long eclipsed its minimum wage, and our state ought to become a leader in advancing economic justice for struggling workers and families.

# Clean Energy

## What are we asking?

We're asking our lawmakers to **support the bipartisan Community Energy Act H.B. 504/ S.B. on community energy that Senator Judy Schwank will introduce soon**. This bill would enable statewide community solar installments that increase access to clean, affordable energy -- particularly for renters and low-income Pennsylvanians. It is similar to the community solar bill that passed the state house with bipartisan support last session, but it's been expanded to include biodigesters to help small farmers, too.

## What are our values?

Our texts teach us that **human beings are tasked with being stewards of our world, "to work it and to protect it" (Gen. 2:15)**. As such, Reform Jews recognize the beauty of God's Earth and appreciate our interconnectedness and interdependence. We have a sacred responsibility to care for the Earth and understand that our actions toward the world impact the quality of our relationships with God and with each other. By advancing a sustainable future for our children and grandchildren, *l'dor vador*, we are fulfilling our role as partners in Creation.

## Talking Points

- The climate crisis is here, and Pennsylvania must protect the vulnerable from its devastating environmental and economic effects.
- Beyond the disastrous damage that climate events do to our communities, rising energy costs are placing a heavy burden on families.
- Renewable energy currently makes up a mere 4% of state energy production, placing us as 40th in the nation.
- 65% of Pennsylvanians want solar energy statewide and in their regions<sup>1</sup>.
- **State energy usage is expected to triple over the next decade, which gives us an amazing opportunity to make sure that cleaner, cheaper energy makes up a much larger percentage of our state's energy production in the coming years.**
- Expanding community solar would spur local economic development and build resilience to price spikes, outages, and climate disasters. We've seen successful community solar programs in New York, New Jersey, and Maryland.
- Plenty of people *want* to tap into the benefits of solar energy, but they might not be able to, because they rent, maybe their rooftop is in shade, or they experience other challenges to putting solar panels on their roof. This bill would allow neighbors, businesses, farmers, and other community members to come together to directly participate in and receive the benefits from a local energy project, like a solar array, connected to their local grid or biodigesters for small farmers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Results based on statewide poll conducted in January-February 2022 with Embold Research

- This would help provide every Pennsylvanian with access to solar and other local energy, lower our energy bills, and improve energy diversity in the commonwealth.