

[Home](#) / New Jersey Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo's Prepared Remarks to State Legislative Budget Committees

New Jersey Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo's Prepared Remarks to State Legislative Budget Committees

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 30, 2025

TRENTON – “Thank you. It’s a privilege to be back in front of the Budget Committee, for the eighth and likely last time, to share our Department’s successes.

As usual, I will get into the numbers and statistics, but at the core of my message today is the work of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development – under the past seven-plus years of the Murphy Administration – is evidence that when we work together, we can do big things for the people of New Jersey.

As I’ve said now many times before this committee, the majority of our Department is federally funded. So, the ups and downs in Washington over the past three months have been concerning, to say the least.

Remember, most of our staff in Unemployment, Workforce, Disability Determination Services, Employer Accounts, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff are 100 percent federally funded.

So, when there has been a federal action that goes too far, we’ve been working hand-in-hand with the Attorney General’s Office, and we continue to win in the courts.

But thanks to the bipartisan work of this Legislature, Governor Murphy, and our staff, the Garden State’s workforce is stronger, more protected, and one of the most empowered in the country.

We have millions of people relying on us to be good stewards of government, and to efficiently and effectively deliver benefits and protections. We take that responsibility very seriously.

When I first testified before you in 2018, I talked about walking into a headquarters full of cubicles filled with boxes of paperwork instead of people. We had unfilled federally funded positions, and overextended employees who lacked the resources needed to effect change.

Just seven years later, I can say without hesitation that the efforts of this team behind me, and 3,000 others across our state, have far exceeded any goal I could have set for this incredible Department.

Thanks to extensive hiring, smart partnerships, technological upgrades, and new legal powers to do right by Garden State workers, our Department – and our workforce – is stronger and fairer, according to the plan put in place by the Murphy Administration.

Thanks largely to bipartisan action, NJDOL has implemented 111 new laws since January of 2018 that directly impact all New Jerseyans trying to earn an honest living and take care of their families.

So, today I don’t want to simply tout the good work we’ve been doing together, but to ensure the evolution that took place remains a new norm for administrations to come.

While the COVID crisis shined a light on the administrative burdens in our system, we can’t lose sight of how we delivered nearly \$40 billion in benefits to 1.6 million workers in just 20 months.

We immediately got to work improving our systems, streamlining our communication, easing our processes, and putting our customers – New Jersey workers – first.

With April 30th celebrated as National Apprenticeship Day, it’s even more appropriate to tout that we have increased apprenticeship programs in this state by 139 percent since 2018.

Since that year, our Workforce Development teams connected with workers 4.3 million times through in-person and virtual services across the state.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services has made nearly 120,000 connections helping individuals with disabilities find and maintain employment.

Our Public Safety and Occupational Safety and Health division led the nation in public-sector consultations in 2024.

We have overseen some of the largest wage theft, misclassification, and child labor cases in our state's history, involving well-known, multinational corporations.

And New Jersey is now considered the gold standard for our nationally recognized anti-fraud and unemployment efforts.

So, when I say that we – collectively – have proven that good government works, I am going to encourage this body to do the same thing I recently urged my own staff: don't stop.

Don't stop helping us to modernize and make things easier for workers to access the incredible services they earned, deserve, and depend on.

Don't stop questioning the status quo, particularly when it comes to alleviating administrative or statutory hurdles.

Don't stop fighting for fairness.

And don't stop standing up for the underserved and underrepresented.

Because neither will we.

I told you upon my confirmation that I saw our role as not only protecting workers but leveling the playing field for good employers who play by the rules and do right by their employees.

During our time here, we've collected approximately \$84 million in wage assessments and penalties, much of which went directly into the hands of workers, where it belongs.

In 2018, we recovered just \$4.9 million in back wages for workers. In 2024, that number was \$19 million. That's a nearly fourfold increase. And this year alone, we've already assessed \$37 million in back wages for nearly 8,500 workers.

A large part of this success is thanks to your support in expanding our Stop-Work Order authority. Nearly 200 have been issued, preventing employers from continuing to operate while violating their employees' rights.

Perhaps more importantly, often immediately prior to issuing a Stop-Work Order, employers come into compliance before we have to take the more drastic action of shutting them down. That is a win for everyone involved.

On our Strategic Enforcement front, 261 businesses have been listed on our Workplace Accountability in Labor List – or as we call it, The WALL. These businesses owe a collective \$25 million in unpaid wages, fines, and penalties – including for failure to follow our tax laws – and until they pay, they will remain publicly named on our website and barred from doing business with any public entity in the state.

And we aren't just going after bad actors, we want to prop up and support the good ones who have been fighting an unfair fight for too long.

It has been a top priority to educate our employers and give them the tools they need to comply with our state's labor laws.

Thanks to you, New Jersey has the strongest prevailing wage laws in the nation, with many more protections added and loopholes closed in recent years. To help our public bodies and registered contractors stay in compliance, we stood up the New Jersey Wage Hub, an online tool to track public projects and certified payrolls.

The signing of the Temporary Workers' Bill of Rights and the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights helped remediate certain carve-outs, or misinterpretations, in our laws that deprived many of these employees from feeling safe and secure, and earning their fair pay. Under the Temporary Worker Bill of Rights, our first three cases alone have assessed more than \$1 million in workers' wages.

Our Wage and Hour investigators are enforcing these laws, and our Outreach teams are proactively spreading the word throughout these worker communities.

When I arrived at the beginning of the Murphy Administration, we didn't have any Wage and Hour investigators. We had 'Field Representatives,' and only 36 of them, with just one who was bilingual. We've spent the last seven years shoring up the division, including going through the arduous process of reclassifying our positions. And today, we now have 67 investigators, an even larger support team, and we can now communicate with New Jersey workers in 8 different languages: Spanish, Polish, Russian, Portuguese, Chinese, Tagalog, Creole, and Hindi.

But it's never just about getting money back for workers, it was about getting money to the workers.

When I first sat before you, I told you how I strongly supported the Governor's proposal to work toward a \$15 minimum wage. I sought to quell some of your concerns for the business community, because there was a lot of 'sky-is-falling' rhetoric claiming this would devastate our businesses and send tens of thousands of jobs out of state.

I sit before you today proud to say that right now, New Jersey has more workers and more employers than at any time in our state's history. And since 2018, the number of private worksites has grown by 22 percent. Businesses with fewer than five workers, the mom and pops who were supposedly all going out of business, whether because of the minimum wage or the dozens of other worker protections this body has passed, they saw historic growth, increasing by 32 percent.

That is a fact. And some of those very same 'sky is falling' groups continue to come before this body with blinders on, reading from the same zero-sum playbook, failing to see the clear evidence that when workers prosper, our businesses thrive and expand alongside them.

So, thank you for bringing family sustaining wages to New Jersey's workers. As a reminder, the federal minimum wage is still an abysmal \$7.25 an hour, as compared to our state's current rate of \$15.49 and growing.

While we're proud of our progress on minimum wage, our goal is to make sure workers are making that wage for as short a time as possible as we upskill them and foster viable, sustainable career paths.

Our Industry Partnerships teams engaged with more than 450 businesses last year alone. They're driving the creation of new apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs in manufacturing, education, and industrial mechanics. They're also providing career awareness events and training opportunities across sectors – including getting New Jersey employers and workers AI-ready.

Nearly \$100 million of state-funded grants have been awarded, helping increase Registered Apprenticeship programs by more than one-and-a-half times since 2018.

We're also upskilling our veterans, justice-involved workers, those impacted by the opioid epidemic, youth workers, and more – because every worker should be treated with dignity and respect.

But as we know, millions of New Jersey workers count on the Department of Labor when they have an unforeseen break in their careers.

I'd like to spend a moment on a topic we have discussed just once or twice before – unemployment.

Our trust fund is in great shape after being ravaged by the pandemic. This is great news and critical for New Jersey workers in need. The current UI federal loan balance is zero dollars. At the last reporting, the trust fund balance was at a robust \$1.6 billion.

While the pandemic shook our economy, New Jersey has made a strong recovery, but as you well know, the vulnerabilities in our systems were brought to light, and I'm glad this was the team at the helm when it came time to right the ship.

We have improved all our communications, increased language access, added self-serve tools, and enhanced the user experience for thousands who rely on our systems each week. Our new cloud-based phone system has reduced our call-back times from up to one hour to just 90 seconds.

We have been modernizing at every turn.

Our Cyber Fraud Investigations Unit was born out of the pandemic, and just a few years later we are now recognized as one of the best in the nation for preventing fraud, particularly through identity theft. Make no mistake – these elaborate attempts from both foreign and domestic criminals – continue to come into our systems daily and threaten our trust fund and every worker and employer.

Our teams are ready, and we're sharing our best practices with partners across the country.

When I first sat here, many questions I received were presciently about technology and making smart, data informed decisions.

Our Office of Information Management Services and Solutions, our IT division, and our Office of Research and Information have undergone an extraordinary transformation over the course of this Administration.

I'm proud to say that our IT and data teams are full partners for every service and benefit this department delivers. That means we are no longer just musing about what has worked in the past but looking at the facts and developing data and customer-focused tech solutions. These two divisions have historically operated behind-the-scenes, but with the rapid emergence of AI, bringing Information Technology and Research to the forefront is not a luxury – it's a necessity.

We made it a priority to ensure that 100 percent of our own staff took part in the Governor's training on how to effectively use AI. Now, New Jersey is among the first states in the nation to use it as a tool to add consistency and accelerate our benefit appeals decisions – which we are also now sharing with our partners around the country.

So, through technology, an empowered workforce, stronger laws, and the resources we need, we've been able to reinvigorate our department and by extension our entire state's workforce.

Really, it comes down to one word: accountability.

Throughout this Administration – even in the most challenging times – we have worked to embed accountability into every aspect of our efforts.

But accountability is a two-way street. We stand firmly committed to upholding the highest standards for ourselves in serving our workers, employers, training providers, and everyone else we serve to regulate. We expect nothing less than the same in return. Together, we must ensure laws and regulations are being followed so every worker and student receives the respect, opportunity, and dignity they deserve.

I said at the top of my remarks that good government works for the people. I implore you to keep proving to states around the country what New Jersey is capable of when smart leadership, commonsense laws, data informed policy making and hardworking civil servants come together under a common mission. Together, we have more work to do in delivering opportunity, stability, and dignity to our workforce.

Thank you for being our partner in good government at work. I look forward to answering your questions today.”

– AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

[← Go back to all press releases](#)

Official NJDOL press releases—straight to your inbox



Subscribe to our mailing list.

[SUBSCRIBE NOW >](#)

Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Home

File or Access Your Claim

Worker Protections

Career Support

Employer Services

Research & Information

About Us

Statewide

Governor Phil Murphy

Lt. Governor Tahesha Way

NJ Home

[Services A to Z](#)

[Departments/Agencies](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy Notice](#)

[Legal Statement & Disclaimers](#)

[Accessibility Statement](#)



Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2025

Department of Labor

1 John Fitch Plz,

Trenton, NJ 08611