



Office of the Attorney General

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Attorney General Racine to Enforce Workers' Rights Laws Against Abusive Employers

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New Authority, Staff, Bilingual Materials to Fight Wage Theft and Other Abusive Practices

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Attorney General Karl A. Racine today announced that the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is launching an aggressive, comprehensive effort to hold abusive employers accountable and ensure that workers receive the wages they are owed. Findings of a 2017 study suggest that wages stolen from American workers by employers who violate minimum-wage laws exceed \$15 billion each year. But workers who lack resources or fear retaliation may have limited recourse when their employers refuse to pay them according to the law.

Attorney General Racine has positioned OAG to step in and help fill the enforcement gap. Under newly expanded legal authority to investigate and pursue wage theft cases, OAG has hired dedicated staff to bring enforcement actions against employers who deprive workers of pay and sick leave. OAG has also launched [free resources](#) to empower workers to protect themselves, including [a wage and hour log book](#) to help workers document their pay and hours worked, as well as [comprehensive information](#) about the District's wage and hour laws. OAG's new worker resources are also available [in Spanish](#).

"While the overwhelming majority of employers follow the law, we will not tolerate the handful of employers who think they can cheat workers in the District," said Attorney General Racine. **"Our office will bring the power of the government to bear against employers that make their money by stealing from their employees. And we will make sure that workers understand their rights and how to take action if employers violate those rights."**

What Is Wage Theft?

Wage theft is the illegal practice of denying workers the wages or benefits they've earned. It affects millions of workers nationally. Unscrupulous employers refuse to pay workers, pay less than the minimum wages, force workers to work extra hours without pay, refuse to pay overtime, or misclassify employees as contractors. Wage theft happens across job types and income levels, but workers in low-wage jobs and immigrants are especially vulnerable to this type of exploitation.

New Enforcement Authority, Staff, & Partnerships

While OAG previously brought wage enforcement actions in cases initiated and investigated by the District's Department of Employment Services (DOES), the recent legislative changes provide the Attorney General with independent enforcement authority. Now, OAG can initiate cases, subpoena employers, and compel them to turn over payroll records and other documentation of their compliance with the District's wage laws. The changes have also streamlined the process by which OAG can enforce DOES orders.

In order to exercise this new authority and better protect workers, OAG has dedicated additional staff resources to fight wage theft. The Council provided OAG funding for two new full-time attorneys dedicated to fighting wage theft in the Fiscal Year 2018 budget. Existing staff members in OAG's Housing and Community Justice Section have also been assigned to protect workers. OAG is also strengthening our partnership with DOES and building new partnerships with local labor and non-profit groups.

Enhanced Penalties for Employers Who Violate the Law

The new statute also enhanced penalties for employers who violate the District's wage and hour laws. OAG can now, in addition to restitution for workers, seek monetary penalties of three times the amount of unpaid wages. The agency also has the power to bring criminal charges against employers who violate the law.

Current Investigations & Enforcement Actions

In pursuing wage-theft cases under the new law, OAG has already won judgments totaling more than \$30,000. In the coming months, OAG will bring larger cases against employers who are repeat offenders or who target vulnerable workers. OAG is currently conducting investigations in industries that have historically seen high incidences of wage theft, including construction, home health care, and the restaurant industry.

New OAG Resources for Workers

The new bilingual OAG [resources](#) for workers include [comprehensive information](#) about the District's wage and hour laws, and information about [where workers can get help](#) if their rights are being violated. OAG is also providing free [wage and hour log books](#). Workers can keep track of their wages and hours in the log book and help ensure they actually receive the pay they have earned. Workers can print the log book, available [here](#).

"The term 'wage theft' is not a metaphor. The money in the cases we are bringing belongs to workers, and we want to make sure they get it," said Attorney General Racine.

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