



PRESS STATEMENT

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Balancing the scales

Columbus wage theft ordinance a win for workers, community and law-abiding businesses

Last evening, the Columbus City Council voted to create the Wage Theft Prevention and Enforcement ordinance. This law creates new consequences for employers who skirt state and federal wage and hour laws. It creates a commission on wage theft with the authority to investigate possible claims. It includes critical reporting requirements, protections against misclassification, and a community and business outreach and education program. Hannah Halbert, Executive Director of Policy Matters Ohio and board treasurer of the Central Ohio Worker Center made this statement:

“Weak wage theft enforcement costs working people, their families and our communities. In Ohio, an estimated 217,000 workers have wages stolen by employers each year through minimum wage violations alone. Wage theft persists in part because state policymakers have not properly funded enforcement. Just five state investigators and one supervisor oversee wage theft enforcement in a state that has 5 million jobs -- not nearly enough for strategic enforcement or proactive investigations.

“It’s up to cities to lead. Cincinnati passed a wage enforcement ordinance in 2016. Now, Columbus has built upon that success and enacted a comprehensive set of protections that will benefit workers and law-abiding employers alike.

“Wage theft is too big a problem to ignore. It hurts some of the city’s poorest residents, who are both most dependent on their earnings to survive, and least likely to be able to assert their rights. It costs cities and the state vital tax revenues. And it creates an underground economy that harms legitimate businesses that follow the law. Leadership must come from local officials and this ordinance provides just that. Policy Matters congratulates the Columbus City Council, Councilmember Dorans, Central Ohio labor leaders and the members of the Central Ohio Worker Center for taking bold action to protect working people.”

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Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.