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Just Pay Cincy: Anti-wage theft ordinance model for Ohio

Cincinnati City Council today became the first in Ohio to pass an ordinance that will step up local enforcement of wage and hour laws. This will ensure that more Cincinnati workers are paid legally required wages for all the hours that they work, by improving monitoring and enforcement of labor law.

Cincinnati's new ordinance is a model for all Ohio cities and a testament to the hard work of the Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center, the Just Pay campaign, and other leaders.

The ordinance creates a zero-tolerance policy for wage theft on city development projects by including wage theft reporting rules and penalties in all economic development contracts. This rule change will ensure all parties to a development project have a stake in preventing wage theft, and the city can recover incentives when wage laws are violated.

"The ordinance will protect workers and their families from employers who steal wages by violating wage and hour laws," said Hannah Halbert, workforce researcher with Policy Matters Ohio. "It will also protect law-abiding employers from unfair competition from unscrupulous businesses that are willing to break the law to make a profit. It's a great move for workers and employers in Cincinnati."

Policy Matters Ohio studied Ohio's wage and hour enforcement system in 2011, and found that the state had only six wage and hour investigators, making Ohio one of the most poorly staffed states in the nation. Our survey looked at 43 states and the District of Columbia.

"Cincinnati has taken a clear stand against wage theft. It's a call to action that other cities and the state should follow," Halbert said.

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