

Introduction

Wage Theft – The Crime Wave No One Talks About

Wage theft is all around us. The illegal underpayment and sometimes nonpayment of workers' wages has become a standard feature of many workers' lives. Stopping and deterring wage theft requires a multi-prong approach. Workers need to be educated about their rights. Employers need to understand their responsibilities. Both individual and organizational consumers must learn to ask questions about wage payment.

In addition, the society must strengthen the institutions that “push back” against wage theft. Having a union in the workplace is one of the best deterrents against wage theft, so supporting workers who seek to organize unions will stop and deter wage theft.

Workers centers that help workers recover wages and organize improvements in smaller workplaces are also important institutions that deserve strong community support. More than 200 workers centers around the country have been organized in the last decade to help workers facing wage theft and injuries in the workplace.

The “push back” forces against wage theft must include strong and effective enforcement agencies that work cooperatively with community partners to educate workers and employers, investigate industries dominated by wage theft and punish those who steal wages, especially those who do so willfully and repeatedly.

IWJ is working on a package of legislative bills to stop and deter wage theft. Please check the website for details on the state of the bills in the house and senate. In addition, groups around the country are working on local wage theft initiatives. Information about the local initiatives can be found at www.wagetheft.org.

The good news about wage theft is that we can stop it. Unlike many of the problems facing the nation, this problem is relatively easy to solve. We simply must create the political will to do so. Please join us in fighting wage theft.