

Remarks of Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell

As Prepared for Delivery

Hearing of the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development

Tuesday, September 19, 2023

Chairman Cutler, Chairwoman Jehlen and Members of the Joint Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am here to testify in strong support of House Bill 1868 and Senate Bill 1158, *An Act to Prevent Wage Theft, Promote Employer Accountability, and Enhance Public Enforcement*, sponsored by Representative Donahue and Senator DiDomenico.

I am joined by Lauren Moran, Chief of my Fair Labor Division.

Massachusetts is home to a dynamic economy. Yet, many workers struggle to secure employment that pays a livable wage and bad actors take advantage of the resulting uncertainty.

Access to a decent-paying job and benefits is essential to ensuring economic security for individuals and families.

As Attorney General, I am committed to robust enforcement of our wage and hour laws:

- To ensure workers are compensated for the hours they work.
- To ensure skilled tradespersons are paid the prevailing wage on taxpayer-funded projects.
- And to protect young workers from unscrupulous employers.

Meaningful and effective enforcement:

- Levels the playing field for businesses that follow the law.

- Protects the state from lost revenue from income and unemployment insurance taxes, and the workers' compensation trust fund.
- And prevents an undue burden on taxpayer-funded social safety net programs.

Our Fair Labor team continues to receive a high volume of reports of violations.

In Fiscal Year 2023, we received 13,000 calls and fielded over 6,600 complaints.

We ordered over \$4.2M to be put back into the pockets of 10,400 workers.

We mandated that violators pay \$9.2 M in penalties to the General Fund.

This bill would improve and enhance the tools used by my office to address wage theft.

This is especially relevant given the proliferation of arbitration agreements and class action waivers, which diminish workers' ability to go to court to address violations.

We complement our law enforcement efforts with outreach to workers and partnerships with advocates, unions, trade organizations and the legal community.

We meet workers where they are. Language access is never a barrier for workers who seek help from our office.

We have translated materials into six different languages, to reflect the diversity of our workforce.

I am proud that the Fair Labor Division has fluency in more than eight languages. And, if we don't speak a language, we hire an interpreter.

We strive to make information accessible, to empower workers and to build trust with the communities we serve.

We host wage clinics in Boston, Springfield, New Bedford, and soon, Worcester.

These clinics provide free legal assistance, help workers find representation and build confidence so they can assert their rights.

Passing a strong, smart, and effective wage theft bill is a priority for me.

We remain available to share our expertise with the Committee.

We look forward to working with all stakeholders, to address a wage theft problem we all recognize.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.