

Communication from Public

Name: James Elmendorf
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Comments for Public Posting: please post

Billionaires & big business vs. fast food workers' rights

Fast food workers are urging City Council to pass the Fast Food Fair Work ordinance to stabilize erratic, punishing schedules and guarantee Know Your Rights training. The training would help workers protect themselves against wage theft, dangerous working conditions, harassment, and discrimination.

Opponents say this law will hurt small franchise operators. But it is the billionaire owners of Chick-Fil-A and Panda Express who are spending big to stop it. So are corporations like Starbucks, Chipotle and In-N-Out Burger, which do not even have individual franchisees.

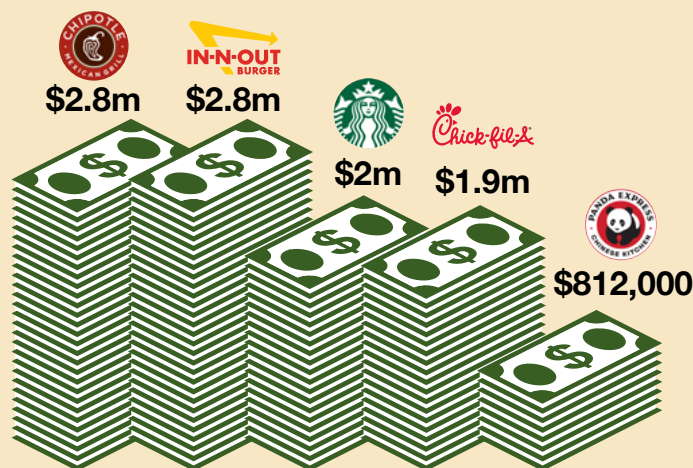
Spending millions fighting fast food workers

Chick-Fil-A, owned by a family of billionaires, gave nearly \$1.6 million¹ to a fast food industry front group² fighting the Fast Food Fair Work ordinance and has spent another \$300,000 directly lobbying against the proposal.³

- Chick-Fil-A is owned by siblings Bubba Cathy, Dan Cathy and Trudy Cathy White,⁴ whose fortune is more than \$40 billion.⁵

Panda Express has no franchised stores,⁶ and its owners Peggy Cherng and Andrew Cherng,⁷ have a fortune of over \$13 billion.⁸ Panda has:

- Kicked in \$750,000 to an industry group opposing the Fast Food Fair Work ordinance.⁹
- Sent lobbyists to meet with the Chief Legislative Analyst about the proposal¹⁰ and spent over \$60,000 lobbying L.A. city officials about “wage issues and fair work week.”¹¹



Donations to industry group opposing Fast Food Fair Work plus direct lobbying of City Council¹⁷

Chipotle,¹² Starbucks¹³ and In-N-Out Burger¹⁴ have NO small-business franchisees. Together they have given a total of almost \$8 million¹⁵ to a fast food industry front group fighting LA's Fast Food Fair Work ordinance.¹⁶

Fast food franchise owners are often large businesses

83%

of franchised fast food restaurants are controlled by multi-unit operators.¹⁸



The average Domino's franchisee operates 9 stores.¹⁹



The average Wingstop franchisee operates 14 stores.²⁰

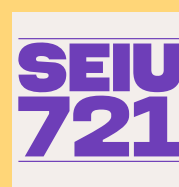


The average Taco Bell franchisee operates 20 stores.²¹

Twelve of the 14 fast food industry “stakeholders” who met with the Chief Legislative Analyst about the Fast Food Fair Work ordinance were fast food corporations, restaurant industry groups or business associations. Only two were franchisees.²²

Endnotes

1. Analysis of contributions to Save Local Restaurants, retrieved from California Secretary of State, June 9, 2026. <https://powersearch.sos.ca.gov/advanced.php>.
2. Save Local Restaurants is headed by Sean Kennedy, an executive with the National Restaurant Association and Matthew Haller, CEO of the International Franchise Association. See: Save Local Restaurants Statement of Information, September 23, 2024, <https://bizfileonline.sos.ca.gov/api/report/GetImageByNum/211113217144248081214045227145206113133044189176>; Sean Kennedy LinkedIn profile, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/seankennedy202/?skipRedirect=true>; and Matthew Haller LinkedIn profile <https://www.linkedin.com/in/matthewhaller/>
3. Lobbying firm reports for Actum I, LLC filed with Los Angeles City Ethics Commission show these amounts for lobbying on behalf of Chick-Fil-A against Council intro 19-0229-S2, the Fast Food Fair Work Ordinance: Q3 2024: \$27,000 <https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/122141>; Q4 2024: \$54,000 (<https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/125468>); Q1 2025: \$40,500 (<https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/128806>); Q2 2025: \$45,000 (<https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/132740>); Q3 2025: \$45,000 (<https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/134884>); Q4 2025: \$60,000 (<https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/137041>); Q1 2026: \$30,000; (<https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/140698>) total: \$316,500
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5. Forbes Real Time Billionaires, searched on "Cathy," June 9, 2026, shows Dan Cathy, Bubba Cathy and Trudy Cathy White each worth \$13.4 billion. <https://www.forbes.com/profile/dan-cathy/>; <https://www.forbes.com/profile/bubba-cathy/>; <https://www.forbes.com/profile/trudy-cathy-white/>
6. Panda Restaurant Group, Frequently Asked Questions, retrieved June 11, 2026. <https://www.pandarg.com/frequently-asked-questions>
7. Panda Restaurant Group, LinkedIn profile describes Panda Restaurant Group as "family owned." <https://www.linkedin.com/company/panda-restaurant-group/> Various sources state that the Cherngs own Panda through the Chergng Family Trust. See e.g. Who Owns Panda Express?, CompaniesHistory.com, March 16, 2026, <https://www.companieshistory.com/who-owns-panda-express/> See also Our Leadership, Panda Restaurant Group, retrieved June 11, 2026, <https://www.pandarg.com/our-leadership>
8. "Peggy Chergng" and "Andrew Chergng" are each worth \$6.6 billion, according to Forbes Real Time Billionaires, retrieved June 18, 2026, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/peggy-cherng/>; <https://www.forbes.com/profile/andrew-cherng-1/>
9. Analysis of contributions to Save Local Restaurants, retrieved from California Secretary of State, June 9, 2026. <https://powersearch.sos.ca.gov/advanced.php>
10. Sharon M. Tso, "Report of the Chief Legislative Analyst," Attachment C, April 22, 2026, https://cityclerk.lacity.org/online/docs/2019/19-0229-s2_rpt_cla_4-22-26.pdf
11. M Strategic Communications Lobbying Firm Quarterly Report, Q42025, Los Angeles City Ethics Commission, <https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/137214>
12. Chipotle, Common Questions, retrieved June 10, 2026 <https://www.chipotle.com/contact-us>.
13. Starbucks, SEC Form 10-K, FYE September 28, 2025, p. 8. <https://www.sec.gov/ix?doc=/Archives/edgar/data/0000829224/000082922425000114/sbux-20250928.htm>
14. In-N-Out Burgers, History, retrieved June 22, 2026, <https://www.in-n-out.com/mediakit/>
15. Analysis of contributions to Save Local Restaurants, retrieved from California Secretary of State, June 9, 2026. <https://powersearch.sos.ca.gov/advanced.php>
16. Save Local Restaurants is the parent of "Protect LA Restaurants," which is organizing opposition to the Fast Food Fair Work ordinance. See <https://protectlarestaurants.com/#Letter>. Save Local Restaurants has spent \$183,000 on lobbying Los Angeles city officials in 2024 and 2025, through the firm California Strategies and Advocacy to lobby on "restaurant related issues," Analysis of Registered City Lobbyists, Payments Made by Clients to Registered Lobbying Firms and City Projects and Agencies Lobbied by Registered Lobbying Firms, datasets retrieved from <https://data.lacity.org/>, February 2026, including almost \$100,000 related to the Fast Food Fair Work ordinance. See <https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/129402>, <https://ethics.lacity.gov/viewdoc/133092>.
17. Analysis of filings for Save Local Restaurants, California Secretary of State <https://powersearch.sos.ca.gov/advanced.php>, and filings on behalf of Chick-Fil-A and Panda Restaurant Group with LA City Ethics Commission <https://ethics.lacity.gov/>
18. Paul Wilbur, How Franchise Development Teams Recruit Multi-Unit Operators Using Data, FranData blog, June 9, 2025, <https://frandata.com/recruiting-multi-unit-franchisees-muo-strategy/>
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20. Wingstop, SEC Form 10-K, FYE December 27, 2025, p. 7, <https://www.sec.gov/ix?doc=/Archives/edgar/data/0001636222/000163622226000008/wing-20251227.htm>
21. LIVE MÁS AND OWN A TACO BELL FRANCHISE, Taco Bell, retrieved June 12, 2026, <https://www.tacobell.com/franchise>
22. Sharon M. Tso, "Report of the Chief Legislative Analyst," April 22, 2026, Attachment C, https://cityclerk.lacity.org/online/docs/2019/19-0229-s2_rpt_cla_4-22-26.pdf. Note: The report identifies Lauren Aguilar as a McDonald's owner operator. This appears to be incorrect: Aguilar's LinkedIn profile identifies her as McDonald's Corporation's Sacramento-based "Director of State and Local Government Relations" since November 2024 (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lauren-aguilar-a0b42bb1/>). The CLA report indicates that three "labor stakeholders" met with the CLA: two from SEIU and one from the SEIU Education and Support Fund, a nonprofit training organization.



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If employers control Know Your Rights training, widespread abuses will persist

Fast food operators are committing rampant violations of fast food workers' rights – from wage theft to sexual harassment; from unaddressed workplace hazards to threatening to fire or call ICE on workers who speak up. That's why fast food workers are calling on LA City Council to pass the [Fast Food Fair Work Ordinance](#), which mandates Know Your Rights training for LA fast food workers.

Many employers continue to violate workers' rights. **Letting those employers select Know Your Rights trainers for workers is like putting arsonists in charge of choosing fire prevention trainers.** The Know Your Rights training program must be run by trainers that workers can trust: independent, culturally competent, and with experience educating low-wage workers.

Training programs run by employers or where employers choose the trainers are not working. State law requires employers to have a “[formal training program](#)” on how to recognize, report and prevent hazards on the job.¹ State law also [requires](#) (often virtual) sexual harassment prevention training for most California workers.² Yet, many fast food workers continue to face dangerous workplaces³ and report that **they have never heard of any training program** on workplace hazard prevention.⁴



Nearly 9 in 10 fast food workers surveyed [don't know how to protect themselves](#) from sexual harassment, dangerous working conditions and other workplace violations.⁸

Some fast food workers report that managers complete trainings for them, provide answers or claim that workers have taken trainings they never did:

“A manager ... does the training for us, because the owner does not want to pay for our time while we do the trainings,” reports a Subway worker.⁵

“I received notifications from Yoshinaya management that I completed trainings that I had never actually done. ... Then the assistant manager showed me a training video and told me the answers she wanted me to put into the test,” says a Yoshinaya employee.⁶

A manager “told me she would complete all the trainings for me, because they were too long,” according to a Jack in the Box worker.⁷

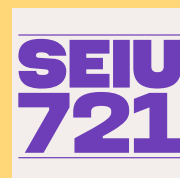
Abuse of fast food workers is a crisis created by fast food employers, and it requires a big, bold solution. Tens of thousands of LA fast food workers urgently need Know Your Rights training. The training can be phased in over a reasonable period. The costs to employers will be modest – about \$100 per worker plus time to attend training.⁹

We know it is possible to deliver robust, required, in-person rights training for a low-wage, significantly immigrant workforce, with a uniform curriculum, because the state has already done it for janitors. **The state requires over 200,000 janitors¹⁰ in California to receive in-person sexual harassment prevention training. The training is paid for by the employer and on paid time**, and provided by trainers with years of experience in the janitorial industry and in training low-wage workers, using approved training content.¹¹

The most efficient and cost-effective way to establish a Know Your Rights training program of this scale is choosing an experienced, independent provider to set up training sites around the City of Los Angeles, develop a curriculum, hire trainers, and run the program. It is clear the training must be in person to be effective. So, **authorizing numerous competing in-person training organizations would result in multiple redundant training sites, duplicated administrative functions – and higher costs for employers.**

Endnotes

1. Developing Your Workplace Injury & Illness Prevention Program, California Department of Industrial Relations & CalOSHA, June 2024, https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/iipp.pdf
2. Sexual Harassment Prevention Training For Employees, California Civil Rights Department, October 2025, https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2022/11/Sexual-Harassment-Prevention-Training-For-Employees-FAQ_ENG.pdf
3. Our Rights at Work: HAZARDOUS HEAT, FAST FOOD & THE PATH TO A SAFER WORKPLACE, August 2025, <https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/wp-content/uploads/SEIU-HEAT-report-LIVE.pdf>
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5. Training We Can Trust: California Fast Food Workers Speak About Know Your Rights Training Needs, SEIU Education & Support Fund, February 2026, p. 37, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RhjqqsTwl4eibVn7pA4jSfLimpTfDEYQ/view?usp=sharing>
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8. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER Workers' Rights Trainings and the Pathway to Improving Conditions in California's Fast Food Industry, February 2024, p. 8, <https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/wp-content/uploads/KYR-Report-FINAL.pdf>
9. California Fast Food Workers Union, Cost analysis, City of Los Angeles Know Your Rights Training for fast food workers, July 2026. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Lo9Dzen66ZhauG7V_xd5FTSWEZigjIPK/view?usp=sharing
10. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, count of "Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners (37-2111)," May 2025, <https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/area/0600000/2025>
11. AB-547 Janitorial workers: sexual violence and harassment prevention training. (2019-2020), https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB547. See also: AB 1978 and AB 547 are mandatory laws for janitorial companies, Ya Basta Center, accessed July 2026, <https://yabastacenter.org/about/>

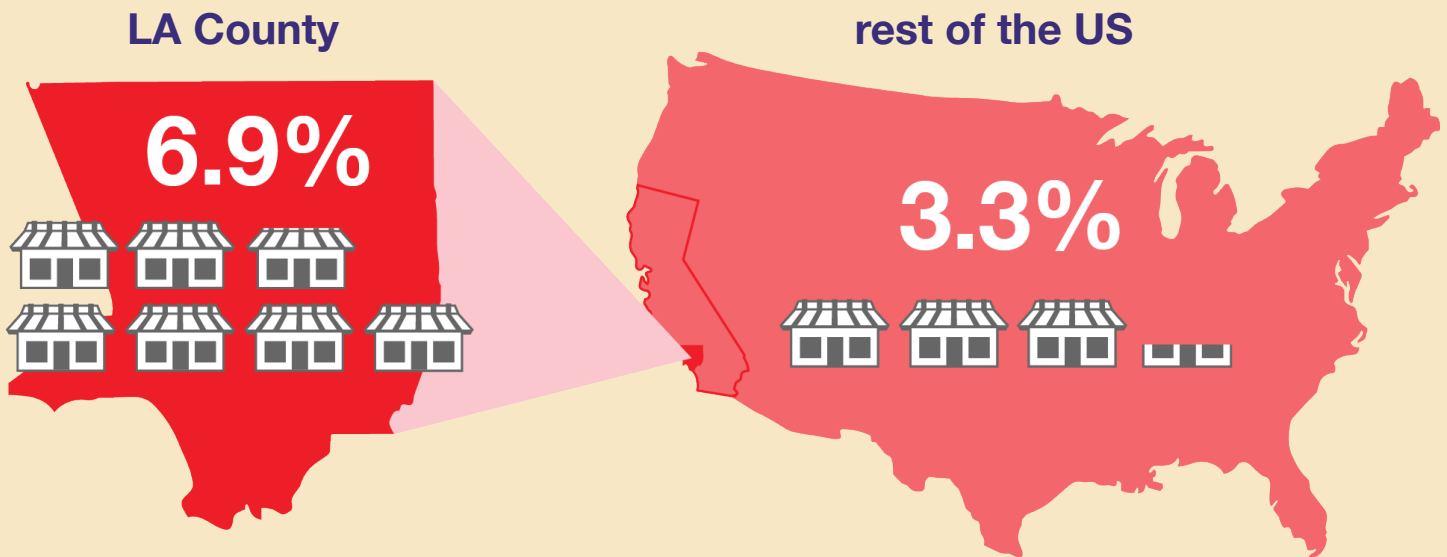


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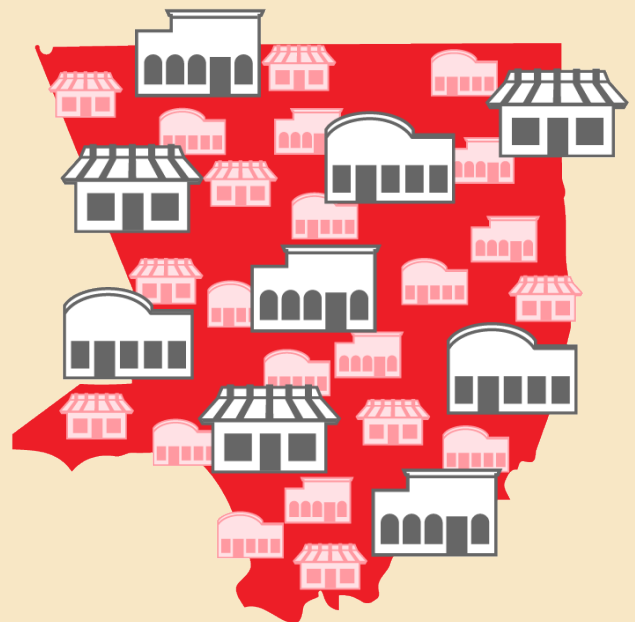
Fast food is growing much faster in LA than in the rest of the country

Growth in fast food restaurants since CA increased fast food minimum wage to \$20, in April 2024:



Source: Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data¹

Nearly 7% growth means LA County has **almost 900** new fast food restaurants since CA increased the fast food minimum wage to \$20/hour.



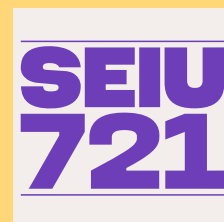
Source: Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data²

Endnotes

1. Analysis of Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages - Bureau of Labor Statistics, Private, NAICS 722513 Limited-service restaurants, Second quarter 2024 to Fourth Quarter 2025, and NAICS 722515 Snack and nonalcoholic beverage bars, Second quarter 2024 to Fourth Quarter 2025, for the U.S., vs. Los Angeles County: https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=17&from=2023&to=2025&qtr=1&own=5&ind=722515&area=US000&supp=1; https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=17&from=2023&to=2025&qtr=1&own=5&ind=722513&area=US000&supp=1 ; https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=17&from=2023&to=2025&qtr=1&own=5&ind=722515&area=06037&supp=1 ; and https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=17&from=2023&to=2025&qtr=1&own=5&ind=722513&area=06037&supp=1

2. Analysis of Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages - Bureau of Labor Statistics, Private, NAICS 722513 Limited-service restaurants, Los Angeles County, Second quarter 2024 to Fourth Quarter 2025, https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=17&from=2023&to=2025&qtr=1&own=5&ind=722515&area=06037&supp=1 , and NAICS 722515 Snack and nonalcoholic beverage bars, Los Angeles County, Second quarter 2024 to Fourth Quarter 2025, https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=17&from=2023&to=2025&qtr=1&own=5&ind=722513&area=06037&supp=1

www.californiafastfoodworkersunion.org
www.seiu721.org
www.sbworkersunited.org



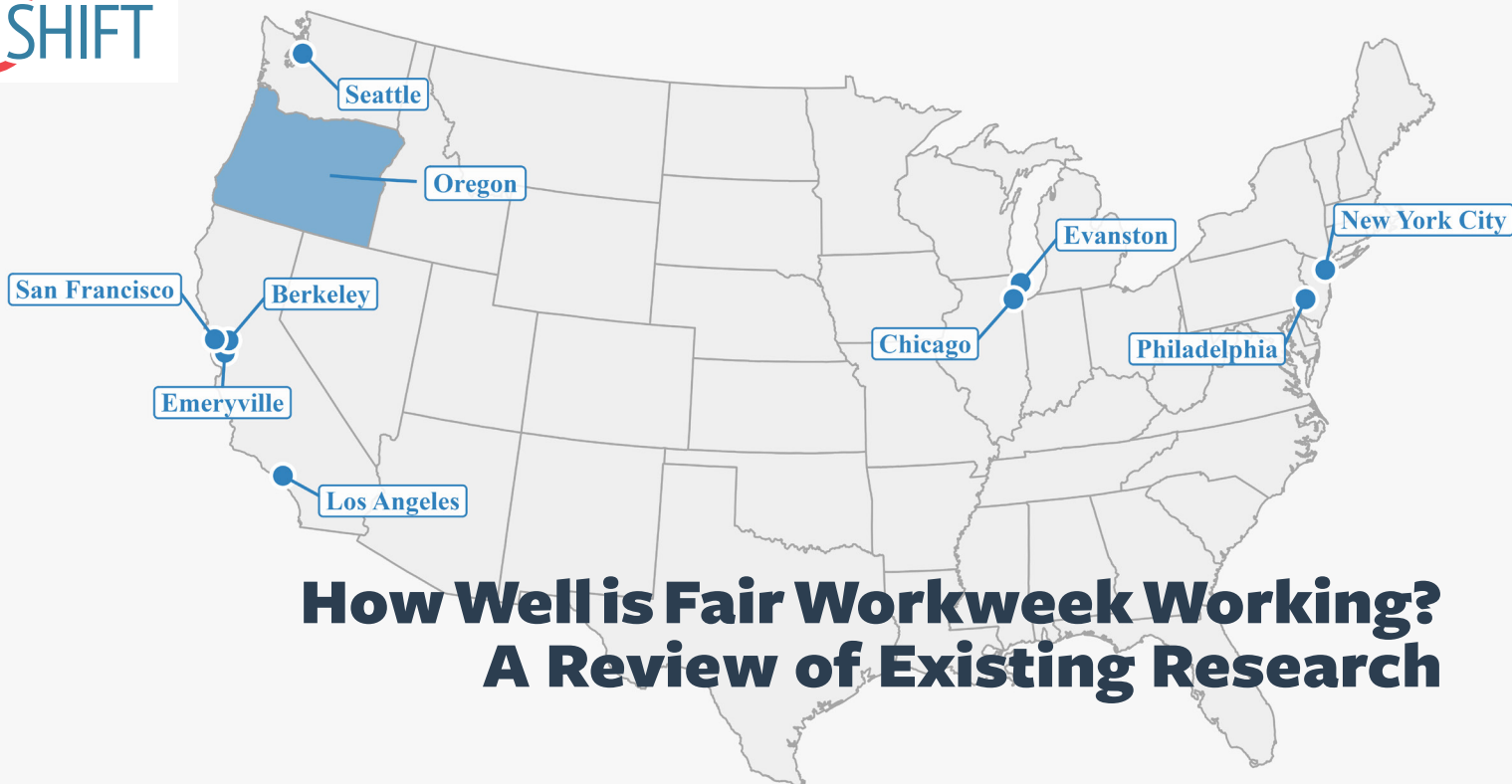
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How Well is Fair Workweek Working? A Review of Existing Research

Executive Summary

Work schedule instability and unpredictability have been identified as critical threats to hourly workers' well-being, on and off the job. In response, over the past decade, policymakers have advanced Fair Workweek (FWW) laws to regulate these labor practices and to secure more stable and predictable schedules for hourly workers. Since San Francisco's adoption of the first FWW policy in 2015, 8 municipalities and 1 state have followed suit and implemented their own regulations intended to discourage employers from engaging in "just-in-time" scheduling practices and to help underemployed workers secure more work hours. While there is room for further research on the intended and unintended consequences of these statutes, a growing body of quantitative evidence offers several valuable insights that can inform future policymaking. Reviewing rigorous studies of the effects of FWW laws, we find:

1. FWW policies can broadly reduce covered workers' exposure to precarious scheduling practices, including having short notice of their work schedules or being assigned on-call shifts.

2. There is no conclusive evidence that FWW laws have had any negative impact on workers' number of work hours or on total employment in targeted industries.
3. While less comprehensively studied, FWW policies appear to have positive impacts on workers' downstream outcomes, namely improving sleep quality and reducing the experience of material hardship.

Fair Workweek Laws: An Overview

Work is fundamental to economic security and well-being, but on-the-job conditions are deeply unequal. Millions of working people, especially in hourly positions, face low wages, limited benefits, and work schedules that are often unstable and unpredictable. This temporal precarity takes the form of an array of scheduling practices including limited advance notice of schedules, on-call shifts, last-minute changes or cancellations, and week-to-week volatility in work hours. These practices are especially widespread in the service sector. Drawing on data collected from food service, retail, logistics, and hospitality workers between 2023 and 2025, prior research from the

Shift Project details that 59% of workers in the service sector regularly received their work schedules with less than two weeks' advance notice; 26% worked an on-call shift in the past month; 42% worked "clopening" (consecutive opening and closing) shifts; 63% had the timing of a shift changed; and 15% had a shift entirely canceled. Nearly 9 in 10 workers were subject to at least one of those five precarious scheduling practices.

A growing body of research demonstrates that instability and unpredictability are detrimental to workers' physical and mental health. Such schedules heighten work-life conflict (e.g., [Henly & Lambert 2014](#)), reduce sleep quality (e.g., [Harknett et al. 2020a](#), [Ananat & Gassman-Pines 2021](#)), and increase household financial fragility (e.g., [Schneider & Harknett 2021a](#)). The negative effects of work schedule precarity extend beyond the affected workers themselves, as it makes arranging high-quality childcare more difficult for working parents ([Carrillo et al. 2017](#), [Harknett et al. 2020b](#)) and is associated with more externalizing ("mad") and internalizing ("sad") behaviors among their children ([Schneider & Harknett 2021b](#)).

While legislation to regulate work scheduling at the federal level, including the [Schedules that Work Act](#) and the [Part-Time Worker Bill of Rights](#), has not been enacted, in recent years many states and localities across the country have passed innovative legislation to regulate these practices. In 2015, San Francisco became the first jurisdiction in the United States to implement a "Fair Workweek" law in an attempt to reduce workers' exposures to unstable and unpredictable scheduling practices. Nine additional jurisdictions have since implemented their own FWW policies. While each FWW law varies with respect to which workers are covered and what protections they are entitled to, common provisions include:

- Requiring advance notice of work schedule, usually 14 days
- Compensation for on-call shifts for which workers are never called in and/or for canceled/reduced shifts
- Compensation for shift timing changes made with short notice
- The right to refuse clopening shifts, and extra pay if accepted
- "Access to hours," guaranteeing current workers' claim to additional hours before their employer makes new hires

We detail the provisions of each existing FWW policy in Table 1. There is a high degree of uniformity across the laws. While Oregon, Philadelphia, and Chicago

phased in the advance notice requirement, at full implementation, all of the ordinances require 14 days' notice (with the exception of New York City's coverage of retail workers). All of the ordinances also require predictability pay, though there is some variation in the amount due across jurisdictions. All of the laws except for San Francisco's FWW policy and New York City's FWW policy for retail workers also regulate clopening shifts by providing a right to decline them and an entitlement to bonus pay if they are worked. The laws differ more markedly in which workers are covered by the ordinance, with most focused on retail and food service, but some, such as Chicago's, covering a broader range of workers.

The Quantitative Evidence Base

Researchers have employed a variety of data sources to estimate the impacts of Fair Workweek laws. These include public administrative data, like the Quarterly Workforce Indicators compiled by the Census Bureau ([Gruber et al. 2026](#)); private administrative data from affected firms ([Kwon & Raman 2023](#)); longstanding government surveys, like the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages ([Pickens & Sojourner 2025](#)); and surveys of workers administered by researchers, like the Shift Project survey ([Harknett et al. 2021](#); [Bruey et al. 2026](#); [Schneider et al. 2026](#)). These different data sources have different strengths and inherently lend themselves to analysis of different outcomes. For example, custom surveys can generally offer the most detailed measures of individual workers' schedule quality as well as of downstream well-being outcomes, but they are not well-suited to detect employment effects and may suffer from limited statistical power relative to analyses that draw on large-scale government surveys.

The methods employed to estimate the causal impact of FWW policies also vary between studies, but most rely on difference-in-differences designs. With this approach, the changes that occur to a treatment group (i.e., covered workers) after an FWW policy is enacted are compared to any changes that might have occurred to a control group (e.g., workers in an uncovered industry or uncovered jurisdiction) over the same period. This effectively accounts for any time trends in outcomes of interest that would have occurred even in the absence of the new policy. However, this method requires data on both the treatment and the control groups before and after policy implementation. This is a tall order when it comes to novel data and is not always possible.

Table 1. Fair Workweek Laws: Provisions by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	First implemented	Fully enforced	Covered industries	Advance notice (days)	Predictability pay			Clopening	
					<i>Timing changed</i>	<i>Shift canceled/reduced</i>	<i>On-call</i>	<i>Hour buffer</i>	<i>Reqs.</i>
San Francisco, CA	Jan. 2015	Jul. 2015	Retail, food service	14	1-4 hours pay per instance	1-4 hours pay per instance	2-4 hours pay if not called in	N/A	
Seattle, WA	Jul. 2017	Jan. 2018	Retail, food service	14	1 hour pay per instance	0.5x pay of lost hours	0.5x pay of hours not worked	10	Right to decline, 1.5x pay if accepted
Oregon	Aug. 2017	Jan. 2019	Retail, food service, hospitality	7	1 hour pay per instance	0.5x pay of lost hours	0.5x pay of hours not worked	10	Right to decline, 1.5x pay if accepted
	Aug. 2018			14					
Emeryville, CA	Jul. 2017	Jan. 2018	Retail, food service	14	1 hour pay per instance	1-4 hours pay per instance	No pay for not being called in, same predictability pay as for regular shifts	11	Right to decline, 1.5x pay if accepted
New York City, NY	Nov. 2017		Retail	3	Up to \$500 per instance			N/A	
			Fast food	14	\$10-\$15 bonus per instance	\$20-\$75 bonus per instance	No pay for not being called in, same predictability pay as for regular shifts	11	Right to decline, \$100 bonus per instance if accepted
Philadelphia, PA	Apr. 2020	Jun. 2021	Retail, food service, hospitality	10	1 hour pay per instance	0.5x pay of lost hours	0.5x pay of hours not worked	9	Right to decline, \$40 bonus per instance if accepted
	Jan. 2021			14					
Chicago, IL	Jul. 2020	Jan. 2021	Retail, food service, healthcare, hospitality, warehouse, construction, manufacturing	10	1 hour pay per instance	1 hour pay per instance, or 0.5x pay of lost hours if <24 hours' notice	No pay for not being called in, same predictability pay as for regular shifts	10	Right to decline, 1.25x pay if accepted
	Jul. 2022			14					
Los Angeles, CA	Apr. 2023 (expanded to entire county in Jul. 2025)	Sep. 2023	Retail	14	1 hour pay per instance	0.5x pay of lost hours	0.5x pay of hours not worked	10	Right to decline, 1.5x pay if accepted
Evanston, IL	Sep. 2023	Jan. 2024	Retail, food service, hospitality, warehouse, construction, manufacturing	14	1 hour pay per instance	1-4 hours pay per instance	Up to 4 hours pay per shift not worked	11	Right to decline, 1.5x pay if accepted
Berkeley, CA	Jan. 2024		Retail, food service, healthcare, hospitality, warehouse, construction, manufacturing	14	1 hour pay per instance	1-4 hours pay per instance	No pay for not being called in, same predictability pay as for regular shifts	11	Right to decline, 1.5x pay if accepted

Starting in 2021, fast food employers in NYC must maintain “regular schedules” for employees based on their availability and cannot reduce their hours by more than 15% without either worker consent or a “bona fide economic reason.”

Table 2. Quantitative Studies on the Effects of Fair Workweek Laws

Authors	Year	FWW locations studied	Methods	Main outcomes	Strengths	Limitations
K. Harknett, D. Schneider, V. Irwin [†]	2021	Seattle	Difference-in-differences (using workers in similar metropolitan areas as comparison) + instrumental variables model	Advance notice, shift changes/cancelations, working on-call, clopening shifts, well-being & economic hardship	Worker-employer matched data structure	Limited pre-treatment data for assessing trends
E. O. Ananat, A. Gassman-Pines, J. A. Fitz-Henley [†]	2022	Emeryville	Difference-in-differences with individual fixed effects (using Emeryville workers at uncovered workplaces as comparison)	Schedule changes, work days & hours, parental & child well-being	Longitudinal data structure, sample constitutes large share of entire target population, granularity of daily scheduling outcomes	Limited statistical power, sample exclusively comprised of working parents
A. Yelowitz	2022	San Francisco, Seattle, Oregon, New York City	Staggered difference-in-differences	Working part-time vs. full-time	Can utilize CPS measures re: why workers transition between part-time & full-time work	Imprecision in identifying covered vs. uncovered workers, potential biases of staggered DID design
C. Kwon, A. Raman	2023	Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles	Difference-in-differences (using untreated neighboring areas as comparison)	Advance notice, consistency in shift timing, number of shifts & work minutes	Large sample, uniquely detailed measures of schedule changes in admin. data	Only 3 employers represented in sample
J. Pickens, A. J. Sojourner [†]	2025	New York City	Synthetic difference-in-differences (within-location and within-industry specifications)	Total employment	Large sample & high statistical power	Imprecision in identifying covered vs. uncovered workers
S. J. Lambert, J. R. Henly, H. Cho, R. Swanson-Varner, Y. He	2025	Seattle, New York City, Chicago	Multivariate modeling + comparing post-treatment means between treated areas & untreated neighboring areas	Advance notice, pay for changed & closely spaced shifts	Detailed measures of FWW compliance	Relies on post-treatment comparisons between covered/uncovered workers without pre-treatment data
A. Gruber [†]	2026	Oregon	Within- and between-state difference-in-differences models	Employment, work hours, monthly earnings	Only study to consider heterogeneity of effects by gender	Imprecision in identifying covered vs. uncovered workers
K. Bruey, A. Soto, D. Schneider, K. Harknett	2026	Los Angeles	Difference-in-differences (using uncovered retail workers in rest of California as comparison)	Advance notice, shift changes/cancelations, working on-call, clopening shifts	Worker-employer matched data structure	Large standard errors arising from limited statistical power
D. Schneider, K. Harknett, D. Arbeláez [†]	2026	Seattle, Oregon, New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago	Stacked & weighted difference-in-differences (using workers in untreated jurisdictions but matching industries as comparison)	Advance notice, shift changes/cancelations, working on-call, clopening shifts, usual work hours	Worker-employer matched data structure, robust quantitative methods, considers possible channels of adjustment	Monthly schedule instability outcomes may not fully capture changes in the intensity of exposures

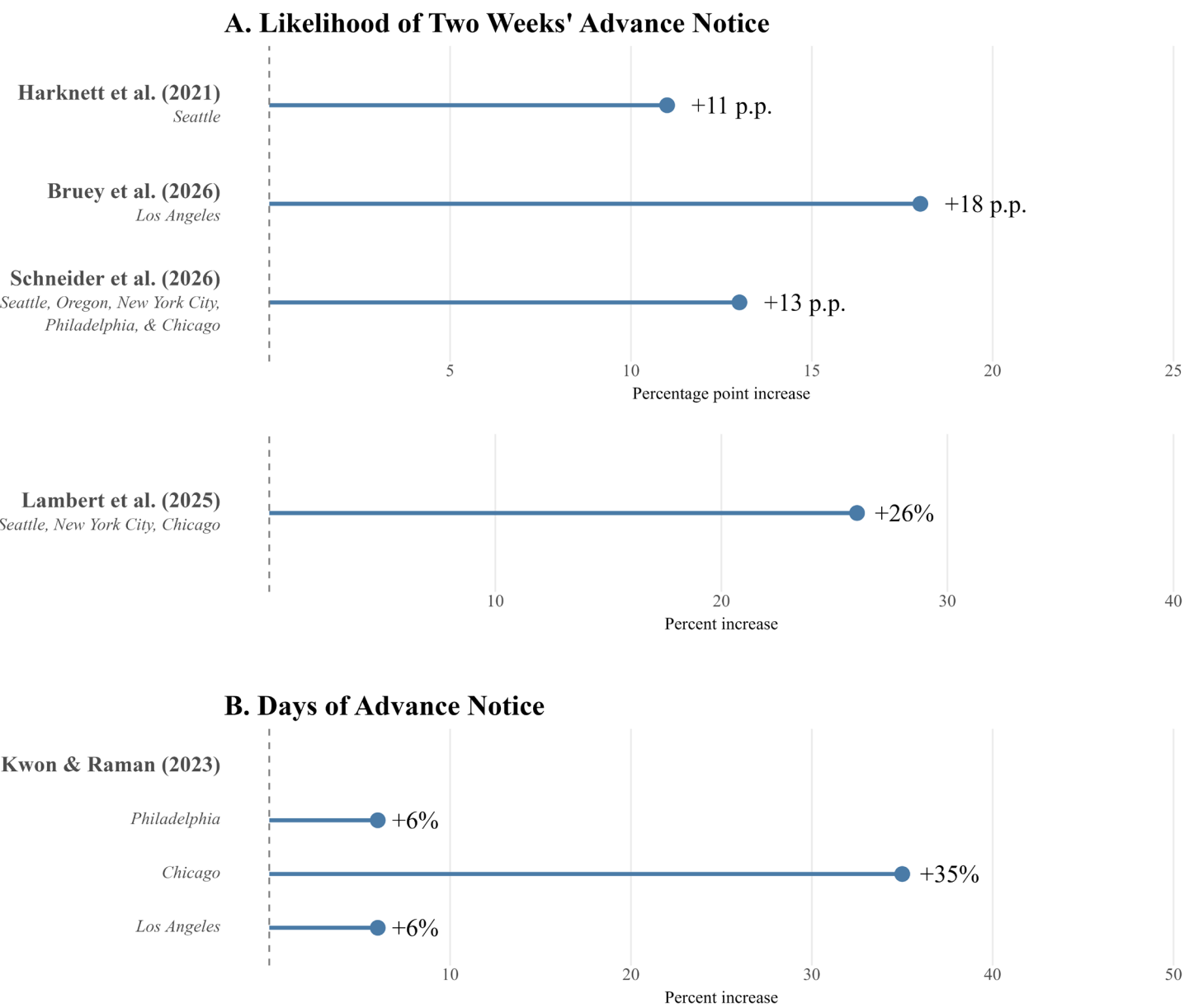
[†] Published in peer-reviewed journal

Effects on Schedule Predictability & Stability

One provision shared among all ten Fair Workweek laws is a requirement that employers provide workers with advance notice—usually 14 days—of their schedules and offer compensation for any schedule changes that may occur with shorter

notice. Four studies attempt to estimate the effects of FWW policies on workers’ advance notice of their schedules, and they all find that such policies succeed in improving schedule predictability.

Figure 1. Effects of Fair Workweek Laws on Advance Notice of Work Schedule



Harknett et al. (2021), Bruey et al. (2026), and Schneider et al. (2026) estimate the percentage point change in the share of workers reporting at least two weeks’ advance notice, whereas Lambert et al. (2025) estimate the percentage change in odds of a worker receiving at least two weeks’ advance and Kwon & Raman (2023) estimate the percentage change in number of days of advance notice. The presented Lambert et al. estimate comes from their “Full Model” specification, which controls for the most covariates.

Harknett et al. (2021) estimate an 11 p.p. increase in workers' likelihood of receiving at least two weeks' notice after Seattle enacted its FWW ordinance, and Bruey et al. (2026) find an even greater increase (18 p.p.) for retail workers newly covered by Los Angeles' FWW policy. Meanwhile, Schneider et al. (2026) aggregate the impacts of 5 separate FWW policies (Seattle, Oregon, New York, City, Philadelphia, & Chicago) and estimate a 13 p.p. increase in the share of workers receiving at least two weeks' notice. Lambert et al. (2025) also aggregate effects across multiple FWW jurisdictions (Seattle, New York City, & Chicago) and find that workers covered by these cities' secure scheduling regulations were 26% more likely to receive at least two weeks' notice as compared to uncovered workers in neighboring areas. However, they find that this overall effect is largely driven by Seattle's FWW ordinance specifically. Kwon & Raman (2023) separately estimate the effects of the FWW laws for workers employed at one of three large employers and find that FWW policies led to increases in workers' average number of days of advance notice at these three companies. However, they observe significant heterogeneity in effect magnitude across the studied jurisdictions (+6% in Philadelphia & Los Angeles vs. +35% in Chicago), which the authors speculate could be attributed to differential pre-FWW norms in scheduling practices between jurisdictions and/or Chicago's contemporaneous minimum wage increase.

In addition to increases in advance notice, the quantitative Fair Workweek evaluation literature broadly finds that these laws yield reductions in the prevalence of several precarious scheduling practices, although measurement of these practices is not well harmonized across studies. Relative to workers in comparable metropolitan areas, Harknett et al. (2021) identify statistically significant declines in the share of Seattle workers reporting shift cancelations (7 p.p.), timing changes (9 p.p.), and clopening shifts (6 p.p.) in the past month, whereas Bruey et al. (2026) find generally larger effects of Los Angeles' FWW

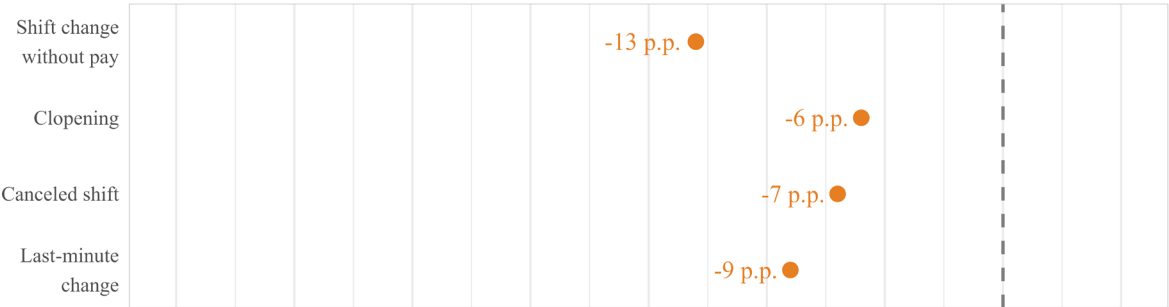
ordinance on a similar array of outcomes, though less precisely estimated. Aggregating the effects of five different FWW policies, Schneider et al. (2026) estimate an 8 p.p. decline in having worked a clopening shift in the prior month and a 7 p.p. decline in having a shift timing changed, with no statistically significant effects on the likelihoods of having a shift canceled or working an on-call shift.

Ananat et al. (2022) consider a similar array of indicators of schedule instability, although they conduct analyses at the more granular person-job-day level. They find that Emeryville's FWW policy reduced the likelihood of a covered worker experiencing a last-minute timing change (-3 p.p.), a surprise shift (-2 p.p.), or overall any schedule change (-4 p.p.) on a given day, with no statistically significant effect on shift cancelations specifically. Lambert et al. (2025) similarly do not find evidence of an effect on shift cancelations, but they do identify a 40% increase in the odds of workers' being paid for "closely spaced" (i.e., separated by fewer than 10 or 11 hours, as determined by that municipality's respective FWW policy) shifts.

Kwon & Raman (2023) are unique in measuring "shift stability," which they operationalize with three outcomes: consistency in the days worked each week, consistency in the start times of shifts worked on the same day of the week, and consistency in the start times of shifts worked on consecutive days. Of note, New York City's FWW policy for fast food workers is the only that contains provisions directly regulating shift stability as defined by these measures, but improving shift stability is nonetheless an objective of FWW advocates across jurisdictions and may indirectly result from the provisions promoting shift predictability. However, Kwon & Raman do not find evidence of any change in the consistency of the days or times of workers' shifts stemming from the Chicago, Philadelphia, or Los Angeles FWW policies.

Figure 2. Effects of Fair Workweek Laws on Other Scheduling Outcomes

Harknett et al. (2021)
Seattle
Outcomes: monthly basis



Ananat et al. (2022)
Emeryville
Outcomes: daily basis



Kwon & Raman (2023)
Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles



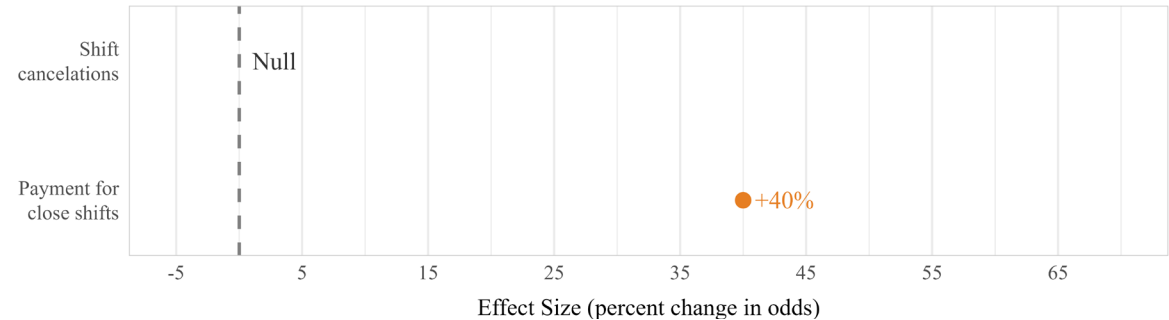
Bruey et al. (2026)
Los Angeles
Outcomes: monthly basis



Schneider et al. (2026)
Seattle, Oregon, New York City, Philadelphia, & Chicago
Outcomes: monthly basis



Lambert et al. (2025)
Seattle, New York City, Chicago



Note from Figure 2: Lambert et al. (2025) estimate the percentage changes in odds of a worker experiencing each scheduling outcome, whereas Harknett et al. (2021), Ananat et al. (2022), Kwon & Raman (2023), Bruey et al. (2026), and Schneider et al. (2026) estimate percentage point changes. Scheduling outcomes estimated by Ananat et al. are measured on a daily basis as opposed to a monthly basis (as in Harknett et al. 2021, Bruey et al. 2026, & Schneider et al. 2026). Kwon & Raman define “shift stability” as a) consistency in the days of the week that workers are scheduled to work, b) consistency in the start times of workers’ shifts on the same day of the week, and c) consistency in the start times of workers’ shifts on back-to-back days. The presented Ananat et al. estimates come from their models specified to maximize pooled post-period data. The presented Lambert et al. estimates come from their “Full Model” specification, which controls for the most covariates.

Effects on Hours and Employment

Beyond schedule instability and unpredictability, many service sector workers also grapple with being unable to secure sufficient work hours to financially support themselves and their families (e.g., [Golden & Kim 2020](#)). To address this issue of hour insufficiency, many FWW policies include “access to hours” provisions that guarantee current employees the opportunity to take on more work hours before new hires are made. However, critics of FWW laws suggest that disincentivizing managers from making last-minute changes to workers’ schedules may encourage them to simply schedule workers for fewer days and hours to begin with—undercutting the intended effects of the access to hours provisions. This possible employer response is an example of “channels of adjustment,” through which employers may try to offset the costs of complying with regulations like FWW protections. Taken together, then, there are contrasting expectations; a channels of adjustment-focused perspective might suggest negative effects on work hours for the current workforce, while compliance with access to hours provisions would suggest positive effects on hours while potentially reducing new hires.

Lambert et al. (2025) attempt to directly assess the impacts of these policies’ access to hours provisions. They find that a majority of workers in three FWW jurisdictions (Chicago, Seattle, and New York City) as well as workers in neighboring non-FWW jurisdictions were offered more hours before new employees were hired—with no statistically significant difference between the two—but do not have pre-implementation data to more directly identify a potential causal effect. Also taking up the question of work hours, Ananat et al. (2022) find null effects of Emeryville’s FWW law on covered workers’ total hours worked, the combined result of a

reduction in the likelihood of working any given day but an increase in average hours per day. Schneider et al. (2026) reaffirm this result, not identifying a statistically significant effect of FWW policies on workers’ number of usual weekly work hours—nor on other possible channels of adjustment, like wages or access to employer-sponsored benefits. Kwon & Raman (2023) similarly find that there were no impacts of the FWW policies in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles on total labor minutes or shifts, although they do find a 12% reduction in new hiring in Philadelphia. In contrast, Yelowitz (2022) suggests that a collection of four FWW laws (San Francisco, Seattle, New York City, & Oregon) produced a large increase (9 p.p.) in part-time work as opposed to full-time work.

Pickens & Sojourner (2025) find no evidence that New York City’s FWW law for fast food workers impacted total employment in the local fast food sector. Gruber (2026) similarly does not find evidence that Oregon’s FWW law had an aggregate effect on employment or work hours in the retail or grocery sectors but does identify heterogeneous impacts by gender: a positive effect on men’s employment and hours and a negative effect on women’s employment and hours. It is suggested that these disparate effects could arise from a perception among managers that men are more reliable to schedule within the regulatory constraints of Oregon’s FWW policy, and/or that men may be more likely to tolerate unlawful just-in-time scheduling practices after the policy’s implementation.

In sum, there is no decisive evidence that FWW laws’ access to hours provisions ultimately increased the number of hours available to covered workers, nor is there decisive evidence that they triggered

channels of adjustment that reduced hours or total employment. Note, however, that the effects of these provisions are likely limited by the relatively lenient nature of the requirements by which employers must abide. For example, Los Angeles' FWW law only gives workers 72 hours to take advantage of the access to hours guarantee before their employer is permitted to make a new hire. Additionally, employers may only have to make workers aware of the opportunity to request more hours through means as subtle as a bulletin posting, rather than via direct notification. If these provisions are to more effectively address the issue of hour insufficiency, stricter implementation requirements may be necessary.

Effects on Wellbeing

The primary goals of Fair Workweek laws were to increase notice of work schedules and reduce last-minute timing changes and clopening shifts and to offer access to more weekly hours. Given a large body of research connecting these schedule conditions to worker well-being and economic security, improvements to work scheduling conditions have the potential for downstream benefits.

Just two studies consider the potential impacts of FWW policies on downstream outcomes that reflect workers' overall well-being. Harknett et al. (2021) estimate that Seattle's FWW ordinance led to an 11 p.p. increase in "very good" or "good" (as opposed to "fair" or "poor") sleep; a 7 p.p. increase in being "very happy" or "pretty happy" (as opposed to "not too happy"); and a 10 p.p. reduction in the likelihood of experiencing one or more of six types of material hardships. However, they do not identify a statistically significant effect on the prevalence of psychological distress among covered workers. Ananat et al. (2022) reaffirm the finding of a positive effect of FWW laws on sleep quality, finding a reduction in parental sleep difficulty while not finding evidence of effects on other outcomes capturing psychological well-being like mood. Given that FWW laws do appear to broadly ease work schedule precarity, these findings are consistent with robust prior research indicating that schedule instability is associated with worse mental and physical health outcomes.

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Appendix

Harknett, K., Schneider, D., and Irwin, V. (2021). “Improving Health and Economic Security by Reducing Work Schedule Uncertainty.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118(42): e2107828118. doi: 10.1073/pnas.2107828118.

- FWW location(s) studied: Seattle
- **Data:** Workers at large service sector firms who completed the online Shift Project survey (nonprobability sample recruited through Facebook & Instagram ads targeted on basis of self-reported employer)
- **Methods:** Difference-in-differences design (using workers at the same large employers as covered Seattle workers but at worksites in different major cities as the comparison group) + an instrumental variable approach identifying impacts on downstream well-being outcomes
- **Key findings:** Seattle’s FWW ordinance increased the share of workers getting at least two weeks’ notice of their schedule (by 11 p.p.), but almost half still reported less than two weeks’ notice, suggesting widespread noncompliance. It also reduced instances of shift timing changes without pay (by 13 p.p.), and there is suggestive evidence it also reduced the prevalence of on-call shifts and clopening shifts. The instrumental variable analysis indicates that these improvements in schedule quality improve workers’ sleep quality and reduce their experience of material hardship.
- **Limitations:** The relatively limited data before FWW ordinance implementation does not allow for assessment of potentially variable pre-trends between treatment and control jurisdictions. The monthly schedule instability outcomes may not capture changes in the intensity of exposures to just-in-time scheduling practices.

Ananat, E. O., Gassman-Pines, A., and Fitz-Henley, J. A. (2022). “The Effects of the Emeryville Fair Workweek Ordinance on the Daily Lives of Low-Wage Workers and Their Families.” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8(5): 45-66. doi: 10.7758/RSF.2022.8.5.03.

- FWW location(s) studied: Emeryville
- **Data:** 3 waves of longitudinal survey data collected from convenience sample of 96 hourly workers in Emeryville with a child age 2-7 (some covered by the FWW ordinance and some not)
- **Methods:** Difference-in-differences design
- **Key findings:** Emeryville’s FWO reduced work days but increased hours per day at covered worksites, yielding an insignificant overall change in weekly work hours, and it decreased the likelihood of workers experiencing schedule changes, especially surprise shifts. The policy also led to significant reductions in parental sleep difficulty.
- **Limitations:** The relatively small sample size (N = 78) for longitudinal analyses reduces statistical power, and the sample is exclusively comprised of working parents, who may differ from the broader population of hourly workers.

Yelowitz, A. (2022). “Predictive Scheduling Laws Do Not Promote Full-Time Work.” *University of Kentucky, Institute for the Study of Free Enterprise. Working Paper 46.*

- **FWW location(s) studied:** San Francisco, Seattle, Oregon, New York City
- **Data:** Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), 2014-2020
- **Methods:** Difference-in-differences design, using retail/food/hospitality workers in California, New York state, & Washington state as a comparison group
- **Key findings:** Among workers, FWW policies led to an increase in part-time work (9 p.p.). This is mostly driven by an increase in involuntary part-time work, suggesting that employers scaled back schedules to comply with the new regulations.
- **Limitations:** Analysis relies on the assumption that individuals’ workplaces are in the same municipality in which they live. It also relies on NAICS industry codes to proxy for treatment status and only considers the firm size variable available in the CPS (which may not be highly accurate) as a determinant of FWW coverage in certain models.

Kwon, C., and Raman, A. (2023). “The Real Effects of Fair Workweek Laws on Work Schedules: Evidence from Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia.” *Harvard Business School. Working Paper.*

- **FWW location(s) studied:** Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles
- **Data:** Private administrative data from 3 large retail chains with information about all hourly workers’ shifts (start time, duration, task)
- **Methods:** Difference-in-differences design (using workers just outside of the covered jurisdictions as the comparison group) + triple difference designs to examine heterogeneity on the basis of gender, wage, and part-time vs. full-time status
- **Key findings:** In all three FWW-covered cities, there were increases in advance notice of work schedules (35% in Chicago, 6% in Los Angeles, 6% in Philadelphia). However, there was no evidence of improvements in the consistency of workers’ schedules (i.e., which days of the week are worked and what times of day are worked) from week to week. There was also no evidence of adverse impacts on the number of scheduled shifts or work minutes, or of heterogeneity of the policies’ impacts on the basis of worker wages (but mixed evidence of potential heterogeneity on the basis of gender and part-time vs. full-time status).
- **Limitations:** Analytic sample is comprised of only three large retailers, limiting external validity. Administrative data does not allow for differentiation between employer-driven instability and worker-driven requests for flexibility.

Pickens, J., and Sojourner, A. J. (2025). “Effects of Fair Workweek Laws on Labor Market Outcomes.” *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*. doi: 10.1111/irel.70000.

- **FWW location(s) studied:** New York City (fast food), with secondary analyses examining Oregon & New York City (retail)
- **Data:** Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data on workers in limited-service restaurants
- **Methods:** Synthetic difference-in-differences design, comparing the New York City fast food sector to other industries in New York City & the fast food sector in other counties
- **Key findings:** There is no evidence of an employment effect of the New York City FWW regulations for fast food workers, although this could be partially driven by employer noncompliance.
- **Limitations:** The estimation approach is potentially biased by the assumption that all New York City fast food workers are covered by the law and cannot capture potential spillover employment effects in other industries.

Lambert, S. J., Henly, J. R., Cho, H., Swanson-Varner, R., and He, Y. (2025). “How Are Municipal-Level Fair Workweek Laws Playing Out on the Ground? Experiences of Food Service and Retail Workers in Three Cities.” *Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Working Paper.*

- **FWW location(s) studied:** Seattle, New York City, Chicago
- **Data:** Qualtrics survey panel of 1,781 retail & food service workers
- **Methods:** Comparing scheduling outcomes between workers at covered firms within city limits to workers at uncovered firms in adjacent areas, using descriptive means as well as multivariate modeling
- **Key findings:** As compared to workers not covered by such policies, workers covered under FWW regulations were more likely to receive extra pay after agreeing to work a different or extended shift and after agreeing to work “closely spaced” shifts. They also were more likely to receive advance notice in accordance with the local FWW policy, although this effect was driven by the Seattle subsample specifically (and a majority of workers in Chicago and New York City still report less than two weeks’ notice). Workers at covered and uncovered worksites received compensation for shift cancellations and hour reductions at similar rates.
- **Limitations:** The absence of data before FWW implementation limits causal interpretation of results.

Gruber, A. (2026). “The Labor Market Impacts of Fair Work Legislation.” *ILR Review* 79(1): 59-90. doi: 10.1177/00197939251355234.

- **FWW location(s) studied:** Oregon
- **Data:** Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) and American Community Survey (ACS)
- **Methods:** Two difference-in-differences designs, one within-state and one across-state (inc. versions with synthetic controls)
- **Key findings:** In some models, there is evidence of small increases in male employment, hours, and average monthly earnings at grocery & food service establishments but decreases in female employment, hours, and average monthly earnings (especially for new hires). In sum, Oregon’s FWW law may have led to compositional changes in this sector, but there is no evidence of an aggregate effect on employment or hours.
- **Limitations:** Some workers considered treated by the FWW law are likely not truly covered, as the analytic approach is unable to fully exclude salaried workers.

Bruey, K., Soto, A., Schneider, D., and Harknett, K. (2026). “Unpredictable and Unstable: Fast Food Jobs in Los Angeles.” *Shift Project Research Brief.*

- **FWW location(s) studied:** Los Angeles
- **Data:** 1,478 retail workers at large service sector firms in California who completed the online Shift Project survey (nonprobability sample recruited through Facebook & Instagram ads targeted on basis of self-reported employer)
- **Methods:** Difference-in-differences design, using retail workers throughout the rest of California (in untreated jurisdictions) as the comparison group
- **Key findings:** Los Angeles’ FWW law led to significant reductions in the share of retail workers reporting less than two weeks’ advance notice of their schedule (18 p.p.), having worked on-call in the past month (22 p.p.), having a shift canceled in the past month (17 p.p.), and having worked clopening shifts in the past month (32 p.p.). However, there is no evidence of the law leading to a reduction in the share of workers reporting a change in shift timing in the past month.
- **Limitations:** The relatively small sample of FWW-covered workers reduces precision of effect size estimates. The monthly schedule instability outcomes may not capture changes in the intensity of exposures to just-in-time scheduling practices.

Schneider, D., Harknett, K., and Arbeláez, D. (2026). “Fair Workweek Laws in the U.S.: An Appraisal of Intended and Unintended Consequences.” *Science Advances* 12 (26). doi:10.1126/sciadv.aea8632.

- FWW location(s) studied: Seattle, Oregon, New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago
- Data: 87,123 workers at large service sector firms who completed the online Shift Project survey (nonprobability sample recruited through Facebook & Instagram ads targeted on basis of self-reported employer)
- Methods: Stacked sub-experiment difference-in-differences design per [Wing et al. \(2024\)](#) using workers in matching industries but untreated jurisdictions across the country as comparison group
 - Also checks robustness to coarsened exact matching and [Callaway-Sant’Anna \(2021\)](#) approaches
- Key findings: FWW policies increased covered workers’ likelihood of receiving at least two weeks’ notice of their work schedules (13 p.p.) and reduced their likelihood of having worked a clopening shift (8 p.p.) or having a shift timing changed (7 p.p.) in the past month. There were no statistically significant effects on shift cancelations, on-call shifts, or workers’ usual weekly work hours. However, there is significant heterogeneity in these effects across the 5 individual FWW policies. There is no evidence that employers adjusted to FWW laws by reducing workers’ wages or access to employer-sponsored benefits.
- Limitations: The monthly schedule instability outcomes may not capture changes in the intensity of exposures to just-in-time scheduling practices.

Communication from Public

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Date Submitted: 08/04/2026 11:44 AM

Council File No: 19-0229-S2

Comments for Public Posting: please post

OUR RIGHTS AT WORK:

IMMIGRATION & LABOR RIGHTS IN FAST FOOD



Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
California Fast Food Workers Union, SEIU

May 2025



COALITION FOR HUMANE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS (CHIRLA)



CHIRLA
Coalition for Humane
Immigrant Rights

CHIRLA's mission is to achieve a just society, fully inclusive of immigrants. CHIRLA was founded in 1986 to advance the human and civil rights of immigrants

and refugees. CHIRLA relies on the love and vision of our community to organize and build power among people, institutions, and organizations to change public opinion and craft progressive policies that promote human, civil and labor rights for everyone. Our Workers' Rights and Labor Legal Services Department is dedicated to empowering immigrant workers to prevent labor abuses by providing them with the knowledge, resources, and legal support needed to address such abuses. We seek to collaborate with labor protection agencies and other organizations that protect the rights of workers to streamline the prevention and reporting of labor abuse. Through our commitment to the intersection of immigration and employment law, we strive to be advocates for justice, ensuring that foreign-born workers can exercise their rights in the workplace with dignity and fairness.

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CALIFORNIA FAST FOOD WORKERS UNION, SEIU



The California Fast Food Workers Union unites fast food workers across brands and locations and is the first of its kind in the country. Part of the Service Employees International Union, this historic union grew out of over a decade of fast food workers organizing across California, beginning with the Fight for \$15 and a Union. Our Union is fighting to

achieve racial and economic justice and transform fast food jobs in the Golden State by fighting for fair pay, safe and healthy workplaces and a voice for all workers in the fast food industry.

<https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/>

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Letter from Angélica Hernandez, Member, California Fast Food Council

Anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies in Washington, and immigration threats from employers, are spreading fear in our communities and having a chilling effect on our workplaces. California policymakers need to step up and take action to make sure fast food workers have the information and tools we need to overcome this fear and intimidation and stand up for our rights at work.

The 2025 California Fast Food Workers Survey – published here – sheds light on the specific ways that fear about immigration status, and lack of knowledge about our rights, are impacting us and our struggle to make improvements for over 600,000 fast food workers across California.

The survey confirms what we see and experience at work every day. Respondents say overwhelmingly that fast food workers who are worried about their immigration status are put at greater risk of workplace hazards and abuses, are less likely to speak up about violations at work, and are less likely to know about and use the rights and programs available to all workers, regardless of immigration status.

We must not let fear silence us, or dampen our determination to transform the fast food industry so that fast food companies treat all of us with the respect we deserve, and provide fair pay and a safe and secure environment for us and our customers.

In my 21 years working in fast food, I have experienced first-hand how fast food companies disregard our rights and our wellbeing. During the COVID pandemic, they told us we were “essential,” but they treated us like we were expendable. But we did not allow our fear to paralyze us. We learned about our rights to be safe at work, which enabled us to turn fear into action. We filed complaints with public agencies. We went on strike at hundreds of fast food locations demanding safety on the job and a voice in the industry.

Since then, we have continued to take action to address the many injustices and hazards we face. We established the Fast Food Council to set standards and make improvements in the industry, including setting the \$20 per hour fast food minimum wage in April 2024. But we still have a long way to go.

The next step in our struggle is to establish Know Your Rights training programs. These programs, provided free by independent organizations, will empower all fast food workers—regardless of immigration status—to know our rights and what to do if our rights are being violated. This will enable us to continue turning fear into action in our fight for safety and dignity at work.

In Unity,

Angelica Hernandez

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Crystal and her coworkers at Jack in the Box started talking about the wage theft they were experiencing, the store manager threatened to call immigration enforcement. “Some of my coworkers panicked. One of the cooks started crying and grabbed her grandson, who was at the store, and ran home as fast as she could, scared they were about to be deported.”

Crystal, who is a US citizen, learned about her rights from the California Fast Food Workers Union, filed a wage claim with the state and was awarded \$11,363.66 in back pay and penalties. “What really upset me was the terror my coworkers experienced when the store manager threatened to call Immigration, and that many of my coworkers were too scared to file wage claims, even though their cases were much worse than mine.”

The heightened fear of immigration enforcement and immigration threats by employers that many California fast food workers are experiencing, combined with a lack of knowledge of workplace rights, deter workers from speaking up about hazards and put them at increased risk of abuse in this high-violation industry.

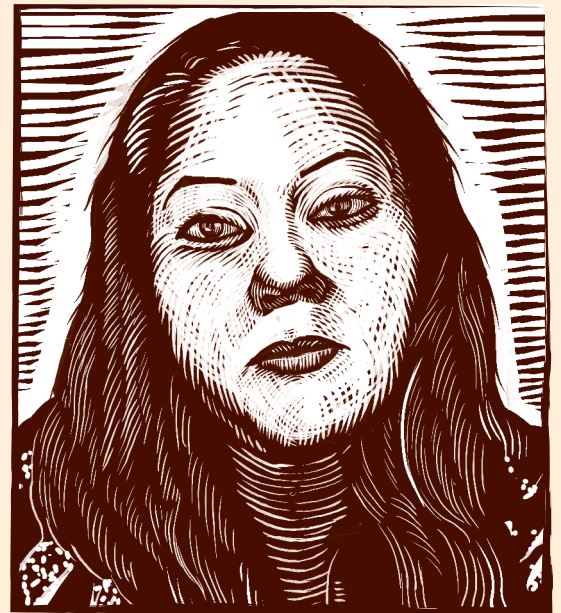
CRYSTAL: MANAGEMENT THREATENED TO CALL IMMIGRATION OVER WAGE THEFT

When my coworkers and I found out about our rights from the California Fast Food Workers Union, we realized we were being cheated, and that we could demand management stop stealing from us and pay us what we were owed.

Management had denied us sick pay, retaliated against us for calling in sick and didn’t allow us to take our meal and rest breaks. For years, a coworker had to work double shifts with no pay for the second shift; and her son, a high school student, was forced to work past midnight on school nights, making it hard for him to stay awake at school.

When the store manager heard we were talking about wage theft, she told my coworkers she was going to call Immigration and the police and have them arrested. Many of my coworkers became too scared to fight for their rights, but some of us filed wage claims with the state, and we received over \$35,000 in back pay and penalties.

—Crystal, fast food worker



KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Among California fast food workers surveyed about immigration and rights at work:¹

82%

SILENCED AT WORK

82% say workers who are worried about their immigration status are less likely to report or file complaints about workplace problems like wage theft, harassment and discrimination, or health and safety hazards.²

67%

AT GREATER RISK OF WAGE THEFT & SAFETY HAZARDS

67% say workers worried about their immigration status are at greater risk of being cheated out of their pay or made to work in a situation that is unsafe.³

63%

DON'T KNOW ABOUT RIGHTS FOR ALL WORKERS, REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

63% of respondents do not know that all workers—regardless of immigration status—have rights to file complaints, claims and lawsuits to address workplace problems such as safety hazards, wage theft, harassment and discrimination.⁴

77%

INJURED WORKERS DETERRED FROM COMPENSATION BENEFITS

77% say worry about immigration status deters injured workers from applying for programs and benefits, such as Workers Compensation and State Disability Insurance.⁵

72%

PREGNANT WORKERS DETERRED FROM MATERNITY LEAVE BENEFITS

72% say worry about immigration status deters pregnant workers from taking paid maternity leave.⁶

94%

DON'T KNOW ABOUT WHICH BENEFITS & PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

94% of respondents don't know about which benefits and programs are available to all California workers regardless of immigration status.⁷

California has more immigrants than any other state, with almost half (45%) of California children having at least one immigrant parent.⁸ Foreign-born workers are a pillar of California's economic strength and vitality, representing one-third of the state's workforce, with higher percentages in major metropolitan areas including Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim (37.9%) and San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara (50.6 %).⁹

While many foreign-born workers have permanent or temporary immigration status, some do not. Existing research shows that regardless of immigration status, foreign-born workers who are concentrated in high-risk jobs experience a higher incidence of labor violations.¹⁰ California has the largest number of undocumented workers in the labor force of any US state.¹¹ Many employers, including restaurant owners, are concerned about heightened federal immigration enforcement causing workforce disruptions and absences.¹² At the same time, employers use threats of immigration enforcement to deter workers from exercising their rights, for example, threatening to call ICE if workers talk about wage theft or file wage claims.¹³

In the 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey, respondents report that workers who are worried about their immigration status are silenced when it comes to reporting safety hazards, wage theft, and other problems; are at greater risk of experiencing these problems; and are less likely than other workers to seek help or pursue justice in their cases.¹⁴ The survey also shows that fast food workers lack awareness of which labor rights and programs are available regardless of immigration status. Respondents also report that workers who are worried about their immigration status are deterred from accessing programs to which they are entitled, such as compensation for injured workers, and paid maternity leave through the State Disability Insurance program.

These findings are in line with results of previous surveys and reports. A 2023 survey of California fast food workers found that workers are often unaware of their rights on the job and broadly lack information about essential benefits and programs.¹⁵

Key Recommendations

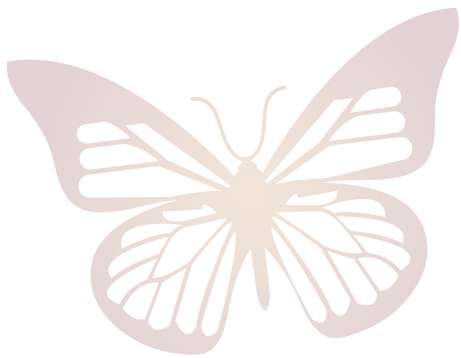
Quality Know Your Rights training is urgently needed to give all fast food workers, including those who are worried about their immigration status, the knowledge and know-how needed to address the problems they face at work. Recommendations for establishing Know Your Rights trainings and strengthening other protections include the following:

-  Know Your Rights trainings must include key information regarding rights, protections, programs and benefits for all fast food workers, regardless of immigration status.
-  To be effective, Know Your Rights trainings must be presented by independent organizations with a track-record of providing training to low-income workers, including foreign-born workers. These programs must be presented in-person, in an environment of trust, where workers feel safe asking questions.¹⁸ Workers need one paid day off each year to attend these trainings.
-  Elected officials should support efforts to pilot Know Your Rights training for fast food workers in the City of Los Angeles and Santa Clara County.
-  Mechanisms to protect workers from retaliation for exercising their rights and from discrimination based on factors such as national origin should be strengthened at the state and local levels.

Heightened anti-immigrant rhetoric, the escalation of federal immigration enforcement including threats of workplace raids, as well as immigration-related threats from employers create a climate of fear for many foreign-born workers and workers from families with mixed immigration status.¹⁶ Although the Biden Administration streamlined a process to give temporary immigration protections to immigrant workers who reported labor abuse, known as labor-based Deferred Action, the future of the program remains uncertain.¹⁷

By enacting employment laws that apply to all workers regardless of immigration status, lawmakers intended to protect all workers by preventing employers from using immigration status as a lever to lower wages and job protections for all. Legal avenues were created to ensure that all employees can report workplace violations without fear of immediate immigration-related consequences or other retaliation. Despite this, many workers incorrectly believe that a worker's immigration status may preclude them from being protected by employment law. By training all fast food workers about their rights and demystifying the legal avenues available to them, fast food jobs can be improved for all workers.

This report presents the findings of the 2025 California Fast Food Workers Survey regarding the specific ways that fear about immigration status and lack of knowledge of labor rights impact fast food workers. Also provided are a summary of workplace rights, programs and benefits enjoyed by all workers, regardless of immigration status; recommendations for Know Your Rights training programs for all fast food workers; and links to more information about the many rights and programs for all fast food workers.



Management was cheating us out of our wages and altering our time sheets. When my coworkers and I refused to sign our timesheets, management forced me to forge everyone's signatures on the timesheets, including the manager's signature.



When my coworkers and I started asking management to pay us correctly, they retaliated against us by cutting our work hours and our incomes, and they threatened to call immigration enforcement on anyone who filed a complaint.

—Adriana, fast food worker

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey was conducted by bilingual outreach workers between January 30, 2025 and February 24, 2025. It included a total of 405 fast-food workers at over 200 fast-food locations in 66 cities across California. Respondents represent 35 different brands, including McDonald's, Jack in the Box, Carl's Jr., Burger King, Subway, KFC and Taco Bell.¹⁹ The survey included a series of in-depth questions about fast food workers' worries regarding immigration status, and how these concerns impact workers' experience of workplace hazards and violations as well as their likelihood to report or file complaints about workplace problems. The survey also included questions about the rights, benefits and programs available to all California workers regardless of immigration status.

ABOUT CALIFORNIA FAST FOOD WORKERS

Over 630,000 workers are employed in California's fast food industry.²⁰ Approximately eighty percent of these workers are people of color, sixty percent are Latino/a, and over a quarter are immigrants.²¹ California's fast food industry employs the second largest group of low-wage workers in the state.²²

California fast food workers experience frequent violations of their workplace rights and often face dangerous, unsanitary, and hostile working conditions. In just the past five years, with the support of the California Fast Food Workers Union, workers have filed more than 500 complaints with state and local agencies documenting wage theft, health and safety hazards, and civil rights and child labor violations in California's fast food workplaces.²³

Numerous studies confirm that these hazards and violations are pervasive.²⁴ Furthermore, workers who exercise their rights or complain about workplace violations often face firings, cuts to hours, and other disciplinary actions – despite legal prohibitions on retaliation.²⁵ The current specter of mass deportation and heavily publicized ICE raids across the country contribute to a culture of fear, further deterring vulnerable workers from reporting violations or filing complaints to address workplace abuses.²⁶

Fast food workers won a landmark victory in 2023 with the passage of AB 1228, which established the California Fast Food Council, a first-of-its-kind statewide body composed of fast food workers, government appointees, and industry leaders, which has the ability to set standards and improve conditions across the industry.²⁷ AB 1228 also established a new minimum wage of \$20 per hour in California's fast food industry, effective April 1, 2024.²⁸

Still, wage theft, harassment and discrimination, and violations of health and safety laws remain widespread and fast food workers continue to struggle with chronic underemployment, unpredictable scheduling, and a lack of knowledge about benefits



and programs to which they are entitled, all of which present challenges to their economic security, health and wellbeing.²⁹

ABOUT THE FAST FOOD INDUSTRY

California is home to approximately 47,000 fast food locations – about one out of every six of the industry’s 300,000 establishments nationwide.³⁰ The five largest publicly traded franchised fast food corporations that operate in California had combined profits of over \$12.45 billion in 2023 (the most recent year for which complete data is available).³¹

Top Publicly Traded Franchised Fast Food Companies Operating in California	
Company	2023 Net Income
McDonald’s	\$8.5 Billion
Restaurant Brands International	\$107 Billion
Yum! Brands	\$1.6 Billion
Jack In The Box	\$131 Million
Domino’s Pizza	\$519 Million
Total	\$12.45 Billion

United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2023 filings

Under the fast food industry’s franchise model, global fast food brands concentrate power and profit at the corporate level which allows them to shield themselves from liability for workplace violations.³² Franchise operators face pressure to control costs where they can, often by keeping staffing levels low and cutting corners on worker training and safety protections, and in some cases workers suffer from wage theft and retaliation as a franchisee reaps financial gain.³³ Workers who are worried about their immigration status are especially vulnerable to the harms inflicted by the fast food franchise system, since they may face immigration-related threats from employers in addition to other forms of retaliation experienced frequently by workers who speak up about workplace problems.³⁴



FAST FOOD WORKER SURVEY RESULTS

SILENCED AT WORK

Fast food workers fear retaliation for speaking up and taking action about problems at work such as wage theft, harassment, discrimination, or health and safety hazards.³⁵

Retaliation by employers includes schedule cuts and changes, changes in work assignments, and firing. Workers who are worried about their immigration status may also fear employer threats and retaliation related to their immigration status, such as firing and deportation.

82%

say workers who are worried about their immigration status are less likely to report or file complaints about workplace problems like wage theft, harassment and discrimination, or health and safety hazards.



Source: 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey³⁶

I talk with my coworkers about joining together when we have problems at work, but many of them are scared of losing their jobs and being deported. They say, “Calladita, me veo más bonita.” – “The quieter I am, the prettier I am.”



I remember when fast food workers were earning \$14.25 per hour, and now we are earning \$20.00 per hour. We won that by speaking up and marching with our Union, and we have to keep going, because prices keep going up.

—Flor, fast food worker

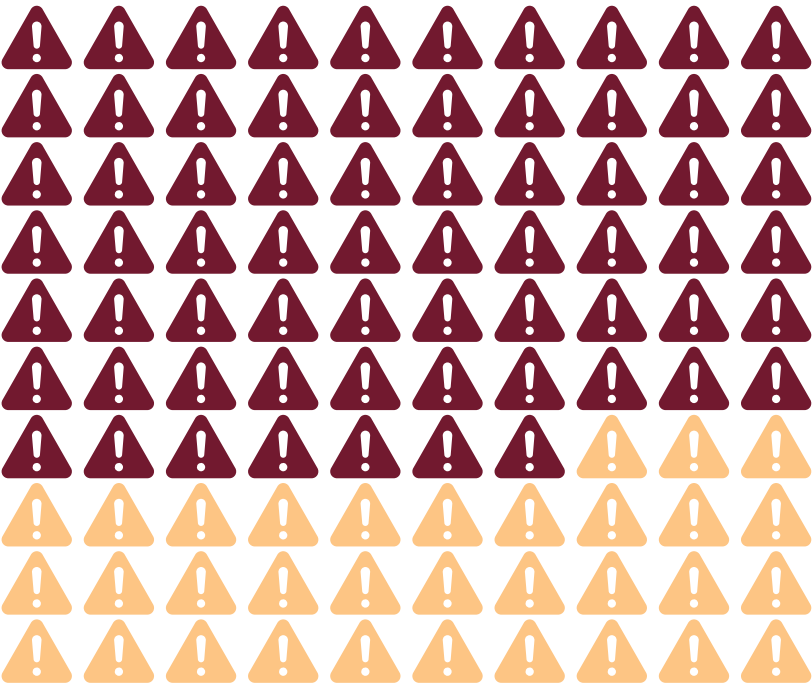
FAST FOOD WORKER SURVEY RESULTS

AT GREATER RISK OF WAGE THEFT & SAFETY HAZARDS

Research shows wage theft, such as minimum wage, overtime and sick pay violations, and exposure to health and safety hazards such as excessive heat and workplace violence, are widespread in fast food.³⁷ Surveyed workers say that workers concerned about their immigration status are at greater risk of being cheated out of their pay or made to work in a situation that is unsafe.

67%

say workers worried about their immigration status are at greater risk of being cheated out of their pay or made to work in a situation that is unsafe.



Source: 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey³⁸

The store manager goes around from worker to worker with papers in English. She says, “It’s about working here,” or “It’s about the evacuation plan,” and she says, “Sign here. It is things you already know.” But we don’t know.

I saw one of my coworkers hesitate to sign, and then she looked at the papers in English, which she could not understand, and she just signed, probably because she didn’t want any trouble.



I see coworkers just nod and agree with whatever the store manager says, because they are scared. Many workers I know fear they could be deported at any time if a manager doesn’t like what they say.

—Emilia, fast food worker

FAST FOOD WORKER SURVEY RESULTS

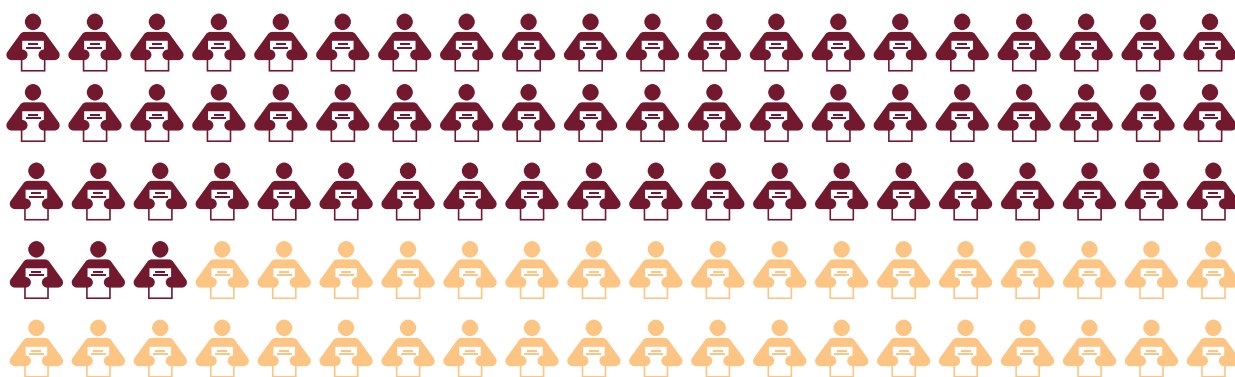
DON'T KNOW ABOUT RIGHTS FOR ALL WORKERS, REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

Research shows fast food workers lack knowledge of their rights and how to uphold them.³⁹

Many also lack awareness that all workers, regardless of immigration status, have rights to file complaints, claims and lawsuits to address workplace problems. Enforcement of workplace rights often must be initiated by complaints or lawsuits by workers.

63%

do not know that all workers, regardless of immigration status, have rights to file complaints, claims and lawsuits to address workplace problems such as safety hazards, wage theft, harassment and discrimination.



Source: 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey⁴⁰

When I first came to this country, I found a job in fast food. The store manager forced me to work under 2 different names in a scheme where he texted me when to clock out under one name and clock in under another name. I wasn't allowed to see the pay stubs for the second name. The store manager told me only he could cash my checks, and he kept some of the money I earned. He rented me a room at his house that I shared with another worker from the store.

I started participating in the Union because I wanted to fight for our rights. I learned that I was being cheated out of my sick pay and overtime pay; that I was supposed to get all my pay on one check, with a pay stub, in my own name; and that I was supposed to have meal breaks and rest breaks.

The store manager would follow me into the walk-in freezer and sexually assault me. After about a year, I worked up the courage to tell the union organizer that I was being sexually assaulted by the store manager, and that I needed help.



I worked very hard. Sometimes I did the work of 3 or 4 people, I would cook, prepare, wrap and present the food, and I did the night manager duties, with only one day off every two weeks. I was proud of my work, but I felt humiliated by the sexual assaults.

With the support of the Union, I was able to stand up for myself and demand a stop to the sexual assaults. The Union helped me file a complaint to hold my manager accountable for what he had done to me, and also helped me file a wage claim for the back pay I was owed.

—Armando, fast food worker

FAST FOOD WORKER SURVEY RESULTS

INJURED WORKERS DETERRED FROM COMPENSATION BENEFITS

Survey responses show that worry about immigration status may deter injured workers from applying for programs and benefits to which they are entitled, such as Workers Compensation and State Disability Insurance.

Workers Compensation provides essential medical care and income replacement for workers experiencing illness or injury as a result of work, and death benefits for workers fatally injured on the job.⁴¹ Workers Compensation also includes first aid treatment as well as mental health treatment, for example, for workers who experienced traumatic events at work, such as gun violence. State Disability Insurance provides short-term income replacement for people who can't work and lose wages due to injury and illness not related to work.⁴² Workers Compensation is paid through insurance policies held by the employer, while employees pay for State Disability Insurance through payroll deductions, typically shown as "CASDI" on workers' pay stubs.

77%

say worry about immigration status deters injured workers from applying for programs and benefits, such as Workers Compensation and State Disability Insurance.



Source: 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey⁴³

During a robbery, my coworker was hit in the head with a gun and I was thrown to the ground and kicked in the back, requiring surgery.

When I filed a Workers Comp claim about it, they fired me, even though I had been working there just fine for 7 years until the robbery.



Right now, a lot of people are scared of ICE. There are a lot of rumors going around that ICE has been spotted here or there, and people are scared to leave their homes. The store where I buy food at lunchtime is empty.

—Marisa, fast food worker

FAST FOOD WORKER SURVEY RESULTS

PREGNANT WORKERS DETERRED FROM MATERNITY LEAVE BENEFITS

Survey responses show that worry about immigration status may deter pregnant workers from applying for paid maternity leave through the state. Maternity leave is crucial for the mother to prepare for and recover from childbirth, and to bond with a new baby. Paid maternity leave is also associated with better long-term health and development outcomes for the child.⁴⁴

In California, paid maternity leave programs provide 90% wage replacement and are funded through employee payroll deductions, typically shown as “CASDI” on worker pay stubs. Paid maternity leave administered by the state Employment Development Department (EDD) consists of Pregnancy Disability Insurance and Paid Family Leave. The duration of paid maternity leave depends on each workers’ specific health needs, and usually totals around 4 months. Pregnancy Disability Leave (PDL) and the California Family Rights Act (CRFA) provide job protection for qualified workers, so that they can return to their jobs after maternity leave. The programs are available to workers regardless of immigration status.

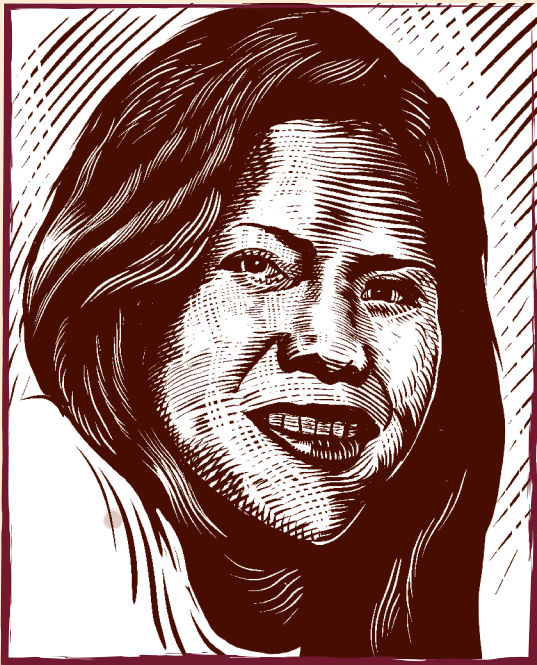
72%

**say worry about immigration status
deters pregnant workers from taking paid
maternity leave.**



Source: 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey⁴⁵

When I was 2 months pregnant, I told my manager about the pregnancy, and even though I felt fine doing my job, they cut my hours to the point that it wasn't worth coming in to work anymore, so I quit. This happened before I knew about laws to protect pregnant workers from discrimination, and before I knew about paid maternity leave programs like Pregnancy Disability Insurance and Paid Family Leave. A lot of immigrant workers like me don't know about these things.



Now I know I should have been able to continue working my regular full-time schedule during my pregnancy, and that I should have been able to take paid maternity leave and then return to my job. My husband is a street vendor and I had always worked, so when we lost my income we had to move to a smaller home in another city.

—Clara, fast food worker

FAST FOOD WORKER SURVEY RESULTS

DON'T KNOW ABOUT BENEFITS & PROGRAMS AVAILABLE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

Many benefits and programs are available to California workers, but research shows that most fast food workers are broadly unaware of them.⁴⁶ The new survey shows that fast food workers overwhelmingly do not know about which benefits and programs are available to workers regardless of immigration status.

94%

of respondents don't know about which benefits and programs are available to all California workers regardless of immigration status, such as Workers Compensation and Disability Insurance for injured workers and California Paid Family Leave.



Source: 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey⁴⁷

People who don't have immigration documents are more scared now. Even people who do have documents are scared.

Management doesn't have to threaten to call immigration, because people are already scared, the fear is already there.



A lot of people think if you don't have immigration papers, you can't get any benefits, but that isn't true, some benefits, like paid family leave, are for everyone.

I think that knowing your rights is the key to not having so much fear—if you learn about your rights, at least you can defend yourself.

—Beatriz, fast food worker

OVERVIEW: IMMIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT LAW

Workplace Laws that Apply Regardless of Immigration Status

Federal and California laws establish protections for workers regarding fair wages, safe working conditions, and protection from discrimination and retaliation. Workers may report violations of these laws and pursue relief and protection from retaliation via complaints to public agencies and through private lawsuits and class actions in state and federal courts.⁴⁸ These laws and mechanisms for enforcement and redress cover all employees, regardless of immigration status.

-  **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)** – provides for minimum wage and overtime pay, as well as regulation of child labor.⁴⁹ The FLSA is enforced by the US Department of Labor.
-  **Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA and Cal/OSHA)** – protects and improves the health and safety of workers by setting and enforcing standards, providing outreach, education and assistance and issuing permits, licenses and certifications.⁵⁰ California has its own OSHA-approved plan (Cal/OSHA), administered by the California Department of Industrial Relations, to address the unique needs of the state's workforce.⁵¹
-  **California Labor Code Protections** – cover wage and hour laws including the Fast Food Minimum Wage, overtime rules, paid sick leave, meal and rest breaks, and related retaliation protections.⁵²
-  **Title VII of the US Civil Rights Act** – prohibits workplace discrimination and harassment based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and is enforced by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).⁵³
-  **California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA)** – offers broader discrimination and harassment protections than federal law under Title VII, also prohibiting discrimination and harassment based on age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, marital status, medical conditions, veteran status, and ancestry.⁵⁴ While language or accent discrimination is not explicitly listed in the FEHA, it may still be addressed under certain circumstances.⁵⁵
-  **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)⁵⁶ and California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA)⁵⁷** – protect employees from disability discrimination and require reasonable accommodations. In California, disability discrimination laws are enforced by the California Civil Rights Department (CRD).⁵⁸
-  **Local Laws** – provide additional workplace protections in many California cities and counties, including higher minimum wages and paid sick leave requirements, as well as fair scheduling and other rights, covering all workers regardless of immigration status.⁵⁹ The City of San Jose, for example, requires that many employers, including fast-food companies, offer work hours to existing, qualified employees before hiring new workers.
-  **Anti-Retaliation Protections** – included in laws providing workplace protections, these provisions protect workers from retaliation for exercising their rights, for example, if they experience termination, suspension, transfer or demotion, reduction in pay or hours, disciplinary actions or threats, or unfair immigration-related practices upon exercising their rights, workers can report the retaliation and pursue justice through relevant agencies, including the US Department of Labor, the Retaliation Complaint Investigation Unit of the California Labor Commissioner's Office and the California Civil Rights Department.⁶⁰

WHEN WORKERS LEARN TO UPHOLD THEIR RIGHTS

There is a robust system of federal, state, and local rights available to all California workers, regardless of immigration status, but enforcement relies largely on workers' knowledge of these rights and how to uphold them. Know Your Rights training can provide workers with the information and skills needed to confront workplace hazards, wage theft, harassment, discrimination and other abuses that are widespread in the fast food industry.

The following examples of challenges fast food workers face every day illustrate the importance and potential of Know Your Rights training:



WAGE THEFT: For three years, management has been requiring Raul and Samuel to arrive two hours before their shifts twice a week and work off-the-clock, unpaid, unloading deliveries. When they learn they have a right to get paid for all hours worked, they join with their coworkers and demand “no more unpaid work” and “back pay for hours worked.” They also file wage claims with the state for the back pay they are owed, saving their pay stubs and schedules as evidence for their cases.



SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Cecilia's manager rubs up against her inappropriately when he walks by her in the kitchen and makes crude comments about her. She tells him to stop and reports him to the store manager, but they continue to schedule her to work at the same time as this manager and cut her schedule in retaliation for making the report. Cecilia talks with her coworkers and finds out other workers are also being harassed. Together they demand an end to sexual harassment at work and seek help from the California Civil Rights Department.



CHILD LABOR LAW VIOLATIONS: Marco, Araceli, Paulina and Juan want to work after school and on the weekends to help their families pay bills and to have money for food and clothes. The store manager schedules them to work past midnight on school nights, and calls them at school during class, demanding that they leave school and come to work right away when the store is short-staffed. Upset about how work is interfering with their studies, they learn about the laws put in place to protect young workers, and seek help from the state Department of Industrial Relations and the federal Department of Labor.

EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND PROGRAMS AVAILABLE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

In California, several state-level employment-related benefits and programs are available to all qualified workers regardless of their immigration status, and many cities and counties have additional provisions. The following state programs provide financial and medical support to employees facing illness, injury, or family responsibilities:



Workers' Compensation – covers medical expenses and lost wages for work-related injuries or illnesses.⁶¹



Paid Sick Leave – ensures all employees accrue paid sick leave under California's Healthy Workplaces, Healthy Families Act.⁶²



California Family Rights Act (CFRA) – allows eligible workers to take unpaid leave for medical and family reasons.⁶³

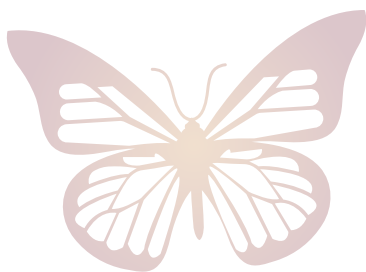


California Paid Family Leave (PFL) – provides wage replacement for workers taking time off to care for a seriously ill family member or bond with a new child.⁶⁴



State Disability Insurance (SDI) – offers partial wage replacement to employees unable to work due to non-job-related illness or injury.⁶⁵

The primary benefit not available to undocumented immigrants is Unemployment Insurance (UI), which requires legal work authorization.⁶⁶ However, most workplace benefits and protections remain accessible regardless of immigration status.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal and California employment laws provide critical protections and benefits to all workers, including foreign-born workers and undocumented workers. While undocumented workers may not qualify for some forms of redress, they are protected under most labor laws and have access to legal avenues for redress. Ensuring that all workers are aware of their rights strengthens workplace protections for everyone and upholds the principles of fair labor standards in the U.S. legal system. Employers cannot be relied upon to educate their employees about their employment rights, as they have a direct conflict of interest. It is essential that training be provided by independent third parties, in a safe space, and in workers' own languages.

Recommendations for establishing Know Your Rights trainings and strengthening other protections include the following:

-  Know Your Rights trainings must include key information regarding rights, protections, programs and benefits for all fast food workers, regardless of immigration status.
-  To be effective, Know Your Rights trainings must be presented by independent organizations with a track-record of providing training to low-income workers, including foreign-born workers. These programs must be presented in-person, in an environment of trust, where workers feel safe asking questions.⁶⁷ Workers need one paid day off each year to attend these trainings.
-  Elected officials should support efforts to pilot Know Your Rights training for fast food workers in the City of Los Angeles and Santa Clara County.
-  Mechanisms to protect workers from retaliation for exercising their rights and from discrimination based on factors such as national origin should be strengthened at the state and local levels.



When the franchise was sold and the new operator did things differently, I realized I had been robbed of hundreds of hours of pay. But I was too scared to do anything about it – even though I had legal permission to work in this country, I wasn't a citizen, and I was afraid of going to court.

I have seen a lot during my 36 years working in fast food. What I see is that people who work undocumented are the most scared and the most victimized. They do whatever management says, out of fear and because they don't know their rights.

A few years ago when I heard about a compañera who had been forced to work sick and later died, I knew I had to get involved in the Union, so I could speak up for coworkers who don't know their rights, or who are too scared to speak up.



My daughter is studying law. I am glad she will know her rights and these things won't happen to her. Fast food workers need independent Know Your Rights training, to be safe at work, and so everyone knows their rights and what to do.

—Esperanza, fast food worker

RESOURCES

CHIRLA offers several resources to support immigrant workers in exercising their rights to prevent and address labor abuses. The following materials are available at <https://www.chirla.org/workersrights/>:



Wage and Hour Guide



Discrimination in the Workplace Guide



Social Security Guide



Workplace Enforcement: Guidance on
Immigration Raids and I-9 Audits

Contact CHIRLA Workers' Rights and
Labor Legal Services Department

(213) 201-8773

www.chirla.org/workersrights





KNOW YOUR RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE

If you are an employee in any industry, you have the right to receive all promised and mandated wages, to be free from discrimination and harassment, and to work in safe and healthy conditions.

EXAMPLES OF WAGE THEFT

- Paying less than the minimum wage or for fewer hours
- Paying late or issuing checks that bounce
- Making unauthorized deductions from your paycheck
- Failing to pay for sick time, promised vacation, or bonuses
- Not providing meal or rest breaks, or requiring you to work through them
- Not reimbursing for food or mileage
- Denying access to your personnel file.



DID YOU KNOW?

Employment law protects everyone regardless of immigration status.



EXAMPLES OF DISCRIMINATION

Unjust treatment based on:

- Race, color
- Religion, creed
- Ancestry, national origin
- Age (40 and over)
- Disability, mental and physical.
- Sex, gender (including pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding or related medical conditions)
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity, gender expression.
- Medical condition
- Genetic information
- Civil status
- Military or veteran status

WORKERS' RIGHTS AND LABOR LEGAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT



CHIRLA

Coalition for Humane
Immigrant Rights

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO FILE A WAGE THEFT COMPLAINT?

- **1 year** for claims for returned checks or lack of access to payroll records
- **2 years** for claims for an oral promise to pay more than the minimum wage.
- **3 years** for minimum wage violations, overtime, non-payment of rest and meal periods, sick leave, illegal deductions from wages or unpaid reimbursements.
- **4 years** if you had a written contract.

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO FILE A DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT ?

At the state level, with the California Department of Civil Rights:

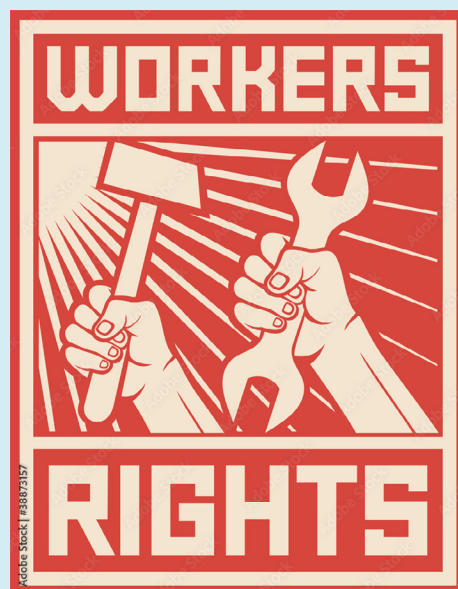
- **3 years in employee cases**
- **1 year in any other case**

At the national level, with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC):

- **180 days**
- **300 days** if there is a law against age discrimination in the workplace within the state.
- 300 days in specific cases

**IF YOU NEED HELP FILLING LABOR
COMPLAINTS OR IF YOU ARE
UNSURE IF YOUR EMPLOYER IS
VIOLATING YOUR WORKERS'
RIGHTS**

**CALL US!
(213) 201-8773**



WORKERS' RIGHTS AND LABOR LEGAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Endnotes

1. California Fast Food Workers Union, "2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey," February 2025.
2. California Fast Food Workers Union, "2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey," February 2025.
3. California Fast Food Workers Union, "2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey," February 2025.
4. California Fast Food Workers Union, "2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey," February 2025.
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About the Artist



PÁVEL ACEVEDO
(b. 1984)

Pável Acevedo is a printmaker, muralist and art educator based between Los Angeles and Inland Empire. He started as a self-taught artist on the Oaxacan coast, and his formal education began in Oaxaca City. As a student of Rufino Tamayo studio, he began taking lithography and painting workshops and concluded his studies at the Fine Arts School of Oaxaca City.

Acevedo emigrated from Oaxaca to Riverside, California where he opened his print studio, Mixtepec. His artwork began to be showcased through the United States, in public and private spaces, through the states of California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and New York as well as internationally in Mexico, Colombia and Peru.

As an independent art educator, Acevedo has been a part of community roots education programs with non-profit organizations such as Self-Help Graphics, Plaza de la Raza, and I Learn America.

His past art residencies include Self-Help Graphics, KALA Art Institute, Fullerton Community College, Art Share LA, College of the Canyons and Horned Toad Print Shop. As a muralist, he has been commissioned to create public art in Los Angeles, Rancho Cucamonga and Riverside.

Acevedo's artwork is included in the collections at The Cheech Center for Chicano Art and Culture, Riverside Art Museum, Center for the Study of Political Graphics, the Wignall Contemporary Museum, Mexic-Arte, Museum of El Paso, the Huntington Library, and the Thomas J. Watson Library at the MET.



<https://www.chirla.org/>



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Communication from Public

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Know Your Rights Training: in-person changes everything

City Council is considering the [Fast Food Fair Work ordinance](#), which would guarantee Know Your Rights training for fast food workers.

As any parent who lived through the COVID 19 pandemic can confirm, humans learn best in person. Watching a screen is no substitute for face-to-face instruction.

Rigorous recent research confirms this common-sense assessment and supports providing KYR training to fast food workers in person.

Engaged and confident: In-person job-safety trainees

- [Were more confident](#) than online participants in using what they learned.¹ That is important in fast food. When fast food workers speak up, managers often make threats: to cut their hours, fire them or call the immigration police.
- [Tended to stick with the training](#), while bigger shares of online participants dropped out.²
- Were more engaged when trainings were [in person and interactive](#).³

In person training is the only way to break through the fear that traps many fast food workers in abusive workplaces, like the Los Angeles Carl's Jr. where Yolanda works.

I went to a Know Your Rights training for fast food workers in May, and I learned I'm not alone. I met other workers who are fighting the same abuses I face in my store.

I learned about ways we fast food workers can protect ourselves from employers, like mine, who lie and tell us we can't use sick days to care for sick family members, and who force us to work when we are sick or injured. From employers who don't pay us for all the hours we work. From employers who threaten to call ICE or cut our hours when we speak up.

It was powerful to be in the same room, face-to-face with other fast food workers and with trainers we can trust to help us stand up for our rights.

This is the kind of training all fast food workers need and deserve.

– Yolanda, Carl's Jr. worker



In-person trainees learn better

- Studies of programs for workers, low-income individuals, vocational school students and incarcerated community college students have found that in-person trainees learn better than those taking classes online.⁴
- Workers participating in-person scored higher on post-training tests than those in virtual courses. And **more of the virtual participants dropped out.**⁵
- Incarcerated community college students taking in-person classes are **more likely to pass** their courses than those taking classes remotely.⁶



In a health and safety training for young workers, pass rates were higher for in-person learners than online learners.⁹

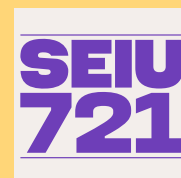


Online training would exclude many fast food workers

Latinas and Latinos and low-income households in the LA area are disproportionately likely to lack a fast internet connection, not to have a tablet or laptop or face other barriers to virtual training, according to a city report.⁷ Fast food workers in LA are majority Latina and Latino.⁸

Endnotes

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Understanding the cost of Fast Food Fair Work in five graphics

The L.A. [Fast Food Fair Work Ordinance](#) would guarantee fast food workers Know Your Rights training to empower them to challenge rampant wage theft, sexual harassment, dangerous workplaces and threats to fire workers who speak up or call ICE on them. The proposal would also protect fast food workers under the city's [fair workweek law](#), which now applies only to retail workers.

Know Your Rights trainings costs would be about **\$100 per worker per year** plus time to attend training.



Sources: Analysis of advertised costs & official data¹
(Detailed breakdown of costs available on request)

Know Your Rights trainings cost a tiny fraction of store sales

Annual sales vs annual direct training costs:



Sources: Company documents; news reports; analysis of advertised costs & official data²

Most CA fast food workers face wage theft

57% of workers surveyed have experienced multiple forms of wage theft.

85% of workers surveyed have experienced at least one form of wage theft.



Wage theft includes working off the clock, working through breaks, not being paid overtime, and being paid less than the minimum wage.

Source: Skimmed and Scammed: Wage Theft from California's Fast Food Workers³

Employers steal wages while opposing training that will empower workers to fight wage theft



Fast food employers steal an average of about \$3,500 a year from LA workers affected by just one kind of wage theft: minimum wage violations.

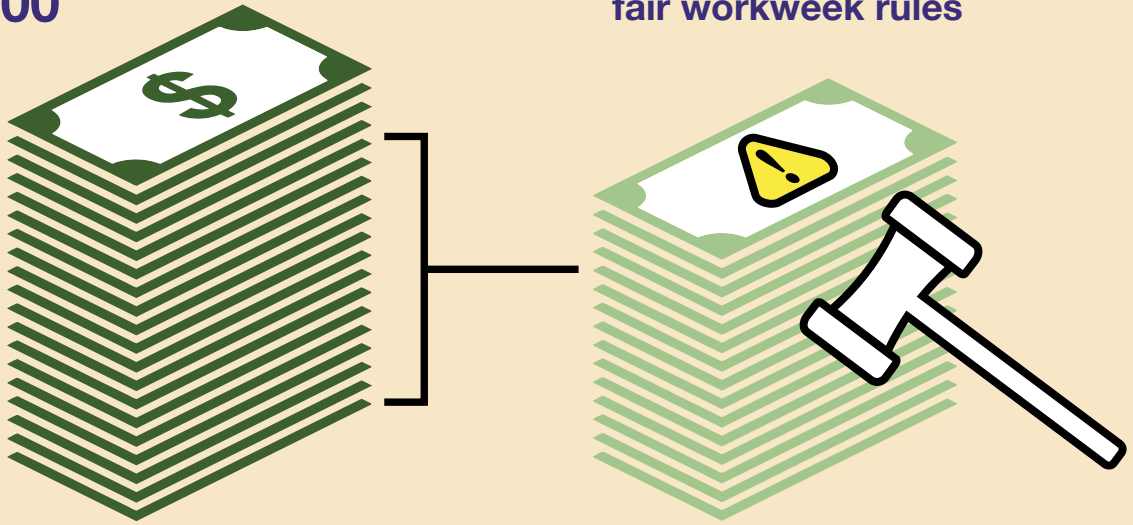
And, employers are fighting to prevent a workers' rights law that would cost them just \$100 per worker plus time to attend training.

Source: Northwestern & Rutgers University; analysis of advertised costs & official data⁴

Industry Fast Food Fair Work cost estimate: mostly fines

According to a restaurant industry report, the cost to employers per worker would be over **\$1,900**

But **\$1,500** of that claimed cost is fines employers would supposedly pay for breaking fair workweek rules



And: fines to date on retail employers for breaking existing fair workweek law come to:



Source: Oxford Economics industry-funded report; City of Los Angeles Office of Wage Standards⁵

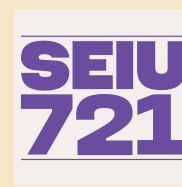
Obeying the law should be a cost of doing business

The costs of Know Your Rights training are modest for law-abiding employers. Much lower than to affected workers of just one type of wage theft – and a tiny fraction of chain restaurant sales.

Know Your Rights training will empower workers to challenge unlawful abuses. So, only law-breaking employers need to worry about the Fast Food Fair Work ordinance.

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Cost analysis, City of Los Angeles Know Your Rights Training for fast food workers

An analysis of the costs of running a Know Your Rights training program for the approximately 50,000 fast food workers in Los Angeles suggests that running the program would cost about \$100 per worker trained per year. The program's other major cost to employers would be providing a day off to each employee to attend the training.

Assumptions:

- City law would require fast food workers to receive annual paid training on their rights on the job, provided by independent, community-based trainers. Trainings would cover workers' rights regarding immigration, safety & health, wage theft, discrimination and harassment, and protections against retaliation.
- The classes would last six hours and be delivered at four locations around the City of Los Angeles. Each class would be taught by one professionally credentialed, full-time instructor, employed by a city-approved nonprofit organization, assisted by two peer trainers paid hourly.
- Most classes would be offered in either Spanish or English; one class per week would be offered in other languages with simultaneous translation.
- Target class size of 20-25; assume average of 22 per class.
- Classes would be offered two per day, six days per week, 47 weeks per year.

Those assumptions result in training about 50,000 workers a year¹ – approximately the number of fast food workers in the City of Los Angeles.²

Estimated costs, LA fast food worker Know Your Rights Training program

Expense category	annual estimate
Trainer pay & benefits	\$2,697,000
Curriculum development, maintenance & peer training	\$300,000
translation services	\$282,000
classroom space rental	\$339,000
Insurance	\$218,000
Admin/support staff pay & benefits	\$486,000
Overhead	\$434,000
Total	\$4,756,000
number of workers to be trained	49,632
estimated per-worker cost	\$96

Source: job listings, real estate industry reports, quotes from service providers

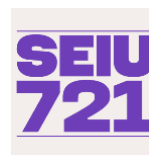
Key cost elements:

- **Trainer compensation:** 11 professional trainers³ paid the average of pay for worker trainers from recent job listings,⁴ plus benefits; two peer trainers per class, compensated at \$34 per hour.⁵
- **Curriculum development & maintenance and training of peer trainers:** Cost of compensating community-based organizations with expertise in worker training in safety/health, immigration, and other labor rights, to develop and maintain curricula for training workers and peer trainers and to conduct training of peer trainers.⁶
- **Translation services:** Cost of simultaneous translation for one class per week in three languages other than Spanish, based on quote from a Los Angeles-based provider of translation services.⁷
- **Classroom rental:** Four classroom locations with two classrooms each. Cost estimate based on average of full-service gross rental rates (including utilities) in Los Angeles area as reported by four commercial real estate brokerages.⁸
- **Workers' Compensation insurance:** estimate of the additional cost to employers of covering fast food workers for one day of paid time off per year for completing training, based on analysis of figures from the Workers' Compensation Insurance Rating Bureau and government sources.⁹
- **Administrative / support staff:** One program director compensated at the average salary of training directors at several LA-area worker training nonprofits and four part-time support staff compensated at \$34 per hour to handle registration and support for training classes.¹⁰
- **Overhead:** Office space rent, printing, office supplies, equipment repair/replacement; contingencies.¹¹

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¹ That is: 22 students per class x 4 class locations x 2 classes per day per location x 6 days of classes per week x 47 weeks of classes per year = 49,362 workers trained per year.

² Proprietary data maintained by California Fast Food Workers Union.

³ Assuming trainers work 47 weeks per year, offering an average of 4.5 classes per week with average attendance of 22 workers per class.

⁴ Based on sampling of salaries offered in job listings for workforce trainers in California searched in August 2025.

⁵ \$33.83/hour is the living wage in LA County for a worker in a family with two working adults and two children, per [MIT Living Wage calculator](#), updated February 2026. It is 17 percent higher than the \$28.92 living wage for a single adult with no children in LA County.

⁶ Estimate based on average grant for Training and Educational Materials Development from the OSHA Susan Harwood grant program for FY 2024.

⁷ Assumes two translators for each language per 6-hour session.

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¹⁰ IRS form 990 data on compensation for training directors or similar for four labor-affiliated worker training or apprenticeship programs.

¹¹ Based on office space rates per square foot from industry reports cited above; estimated printing/materials costs; office supplies based on reported per-person averages, plus an amount for contingencies.

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The Fast Food Fair Work Ordinance will bring urgently-needed protections to more than 50,000 LA fast food workers, helping to ensure they **know their rights** and have the tools they need to help **address violations and abuses** they frequently face. The law will place fast food workers under the existing Fair Work Week law. The restaurant lobby has fought food safety regulations,¹ the \$20 minimum wage,² and now the Fast Food Fair Work Ordinance.³ Their arguments against the Ordinance don't hold up:

- UC Berkeley economists found that the \$20 fast food minimum wage **did not cost jobs** and led to [minimal price increases](#) — about **6 cents on a \$4 item**.⁴
- The **number of fast food restaurants is growing more than twice as fast in the LA area as in the rest of the country**. **Fast food store count rose over 6% in LA County**⁵ compared to less than 3%⁶ for the rest of the country since the \$20 minimum wage went into effect.
- Order taking kiosks [don't save labor](#). Restaurants often move workers from the register to the kitchen when they install kiosks — because kiosks increase sales by up to 30 percent.⁷ Kitchen robots? Not practical in most restaurants, according to McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski.⁸
- The costs of KnowYour Rights training are modest: **about \$100 per worker plus time off to attend**.⁹

Wage theft and unsafe jobs

In over 100 complaints to regulators since 2020, LA fast food workers charge their bosses with stealing their wages, breaking safety rules and retaliating when workers report these violations.

These complaints represent a fraction of the hazards and harms Los Angeles fast food workers experience. [Most don't know their rights](#).¹⁰ Many others have likely *not* filed complaints because they are afraid their bosses will fire them, write them up or call ICE if they do. The threat of retaliation disproportionately deters workers of color, and most California fast food workers are Latina/Latino, Black or Asian.¹¹

"I would like LA to make history by passing this new law so all the workers know about their rights."

Candida Masin,
LA McDonald's worker



LA FAST FOOD BY THE NUMBERS

**FAST
FOOD
LOCATIONS:**

about **2500**

**TOP
BRANDS**

Starbucks
Subway
McDonald's
Jack In The Box

**FAST
FOOD
WORKERS**

about **50,000**

**FAST FOOD
WORKERS
EXPERIENCING
MULTIPLE FORMS
OF WAGE THEFT:**

about **28,000**¹²

**COST OF
MINIMUM WAGE
VIOLATIONS FOR
LA FAST FOOD
WORKERS***

about **\$32**
MILLION a year¹³

**911 CALLS
FROM
DISTRICT 8
FAST FOOD
LOCATIONS****

about **20,000**¹⁴

*Not including other kinds of wage theft

**Six leading brands, 2021 to 2023

Wage theft

In California, nearly six in 10 fast food workers have endured [multiple forms of wage theft](#).¹⁵ Just *one* type of wage theft — paying less than the minimum wage — costs each affected LA-area worker nearly \$3,500 a year.¹⁶ All over the city, unscrupulous fast food operators are picking employees' pockets:

- **A Subway in Playa Vista has repeatedly [bounced paychecks](#)**, costing employees hundreds of dollars in fees, preventing them from paying bills,¹⁷ and costing one worker her apartment.¹⁸
- **A Pizza Hut in Historic Filipinotown skimmed hours from paychecks**, failed to pay overtime,¹⁹ and failed to provide paid sick leave²⁰ according to workers. One worker fell behind \$2,300 on rent and had to rely on loans and food from family members.²¹



Workers on strike at an Eastside McDonald's demand passage of Fast Food Fair Work Ordinance

Harassment and violence

Fast food workers are at high risk for workplace violence,²² and Los Angeles is no exception: Nearly 20,000 assaults, robberies, burglaries, and other incidents generated calls to 911 from six leading fast food brands' LA locations between 2021 and 2023.²³

State law [requires](#) employers to have a violence prevention plan and to train employees on the plan.²⁴ But workers routinely report they have never heard of such a plan, let alone been trained on how to handle incidents such as these:

- **A widower recently [sued McDonald's](#) after a 2024 attack on him and his wife in the drive thru of a Boyle Heights McDonald's**. His wife later died of her injuries. The suit cites a long history of violence at the store and the employer's failure to hire security or provide training in handling violent situations.²⁵ There were 911 calls from the store every two weeks on average from 2021 to 2023.²⁶
- **Management required workers to clean up the blood of a man murdered** at the back door of a Rampart Village Domino's in 2024.²⁷ "The store manager never asked us if we were okay...we just had to keep working like nothing had happened."²⁸
- **"Violence happens every day,"** at a McDonald's in South L.A., workers report. "Management does not tell us what is going on or what to do when there is an incident. Usually we just find out about it because we hear the screams of our coworkers."²⁹ There were calls to 911 from this McDonald's on West Manchester more than once a week from 2021 to 2023.³⁰ In one incident, a customer hit a worker in the face after a dispute, and told a friend to "go get the gun."³¹

Retaliation chills fast food workers

Employers often punish workers for exercising workplace rights or reporting problems.

- **“I am cutting your schedule because I don’t like it when people don’t show up,”** a manager told a worker at the WaBa Grill in East Hollywood after the worker called in sick for three days, also saying **“I am teaching you a lesson.”**³²
- One of the workers at the Playa Vista Subway reported that **a manager removed her from the schedule after she complained about bounced paychecks.**³³

Punishing schedules push workers toward homelessness

California fast food workers have the most unstable schedules in the service sector.³⁴ Most say they have worked “clopening” shifts and experienced last-minute schedule changes. And their hours swing wildly: There is typically a 13-hour gap between their busiest and slowest weeks. That’s according to a [recent survey](#) of over 1,000 LA- area fast food and retail workers by Harvard and UC Berkeley’s Shift Project.³⁵ The resulting volatile incomes³⁶ can force fast food workers into homelessness.³⁷

The solution: Fast Food Fair Work

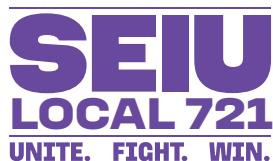
The Ordinance will reduce fast food workers’ risk of homelessness by bringing them under LA’s existing [Fair Work Week law](#), requiring two weeks’ notice of their schedules. The law is already working for retail employees — reducing short notice, canceled shifts, and overall schedule instability.³⁸

The law will also provide KnowYour Rights training to fast food workers citywide. For law-abiding employers, the modest cost of this training³⁹ — is an investment in leveling the playing field.



A manager ... has our passwords and does the [food safety] training for us, because the owner does not want to pay for our time while we do the trainings. When the Subway where I work was overrun with rats, we didn’t know what to do until we learned from the Union how to report it to the health department, and they shut the store and forced the company to get rid of the rats and disinfect the store. All fast food workers need trainings on these things.

Elias, Subway worker, Eagle Rock (Los Angeles), September 2025⁴⁰



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Endnotes

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- 10 Knowledge is Power: Workers' Rights Trainings and the Pathway to Improving Conditions in California's Fast Food Industry, Step Forward Foundation and California Fast Food Workers Union, February 2024, p. 1. <https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/wp-content/uploads/KYR-Report-FINAL.pdf>
- 11 Across all industries, four in 10 California workers — including half of Black workers and nearly half of Latina/Latino workers — say the threat of firing or other discipline could stop them from banding together to fight abuses. Tsedeye Gebreselassie, Nayantara Mehta and Irene Tung, How California can Lead on Retaliation Reforms to Dismantle Workplace Inequality. National Employment Law Project, November 2022, p. 5. <https://www.nelp.org/app/uploads/2022/11/NELP-Report-CA-Retaliation-Funds-2022.pdf> In California, the majority of fast food workers are Latina/Latino, Black or Asian. Jeremy Thompson, Demographic Profile of Fast Food Workers in California, Los Angeles County, Los Angeles City, and Santa Clara County, September 2025.
- 12 California Fast Food Workers Union calculations based on proprietary data maintained by the union (estimate of fast food workers in District) and percentage of fast food workers who report experiencing multiple forms of wage theft (57 percent). See Skimmed and Scammed: Wage Theft from California's Fast Food Workers, May 2022, p. 3. <https://fastfoodjusticeahora.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/May-2022-Skimmed-and-Scammed-Wage-Theft-in-CA-Fast-Food-.pdf>
- 13 California Fast Food Workers Union calculations based on proprietary data maintained by the union (estimate of fast food workers in District) and estimates of average fast food workers' losses to minimum wage violations in Daniel Galvin & Jake Barnes, Wage Theft in the Fast Food Industry: Minimum Wage Violations in Los Angeles, Workplace Justice Lab (Northwestern University/Rutgers University), February 2025, p. 4. <https://sites.northwestern.edu/workplacejusticelabnu/files/2025/02/wjl-ff-la.pdf>
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- 17 Complaint to Labor Commissioner's Office, DLSE, re: Subway, 8406 Lincoln Boulevard, Los Angeles CA 90045, February 29, 2024.
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- 20 Wage theft complaint to the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement re: Pizza Hut, 2542 W Temple St, Los Angeles 90026, March 6, 2024.
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Wage Theft in the Fast Food Industry: Minimum Wage Violations in Los Angeles

Key Findings:

- More and more LA-area fast food workers are experiencing minimum wage violations. One in four fast food workers were paid below the minimum wage in 2024. That's *eight times* the 3 percent rate in 2009.
- A bigger share of LA-area fast food workers experience this form of wage theft than any of the other industries we analyzed – restaurants (not fast food); health care support; retail; and transportation/warehousing.
- Fast food workers in the LA area lose almost \$3,500 a year – about 16 percent of their income – because employers are paying them below the minimum wage. That adds up to over a quarter of a billion dollars in the last six years.

Since 2016, the minimum wage in California has grown from \$10 per hour to \$16.50 today; in the city of Los Angeles, the minimum wage has grown from \$10 per hour to \$17.28 per hour. Studies have shown that these increases have produced significant [wage growth](#) for California workers, had minimal effects on [employment](#), led to minor increases in [prices](#), and generated valuable [revenue](#) for the state.

Statutory minimum wage increases, however, do not guarantee that workers will collect the full amount they have earned and to which they are legally entitled. A recent study found that over [\\$1.5 billion](#) in unpaid wages were recovered by state and federal authorities between 2021 and 2023 through enforcement and litigation. This figure represents only the

tip of the iceberg, however, as [most instances](#) of wage theft still go [unreported](#).

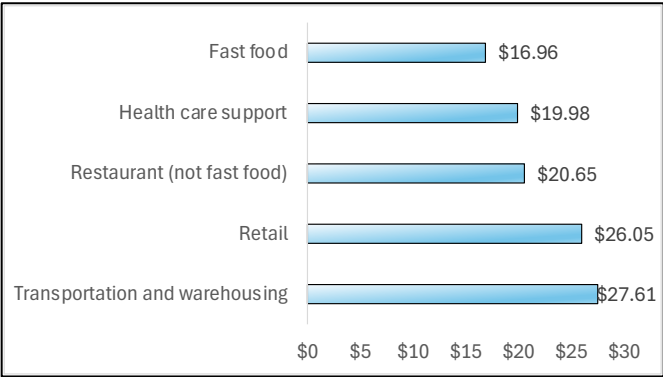
This research brief uses survey data to examine underlying rates of wage theft in the fast food industry in greater Los Angeles.¹

We find that a growing number of fast food workers are experiencing minimum wage violations; a higher share of fast food workers suffer this form of wage theft than workers in comparable industries; and the losses fast food workers incur are significant (16% of their income). With [88 percent](#) of fast food workers lacking full knowledge of basic workplace rights, these findings underscore the need for mandatory third-party “know your rights” trainings as [recently proposed](#) to the Los Angeles City Council.

Fast food workers in Los Angeles

Fast food workers in greater Los Angeles have historically earned lower wages, on average, than comparable workers. As shown in **Fig. 1**, between 2019 and 2024, fast food workers earned \$16.96 per hour on average—significantly less than workers in other service-sector industries.

Fig. 1: Average Hourly Wage in Greater Los Angeles, 2019-2024



California’s Fast Food Accountability and Standards (FAST) Recovery Act ([AB 1228](#)), as [amended](#) in 2023, raised the minimum wage for fast food workers across the state to \$20 beginning April 1, 2024. The law also established a Fast Food Council to monitor and set minimum wages and adopt other employment standards in the industry. Scholars have shown that since April 2024, the new law has provided [much-needed support](#) to the approximately 750,000 fast food workers whose wages and working conditions have long lagged behind those of comparable workers in the state.

We still do not have a good sense, however, of (a) the prevalence of minimum wage violations in the fast food industry; (b) how fast food violation rates compare to other industries; or (c) how violation rates and the costs to fast food workers have changed over time.

To address these questions, the Workplace Justice Lab turned to the Current Population Survey (CPS), which serves as the federal government’s primary source of monthly labor force statistics. The CPS is designed to produce reliable estimates at the national and state levels, as well as for the country’s largest metropolitan areas (including Los Angeles). CPS earnings and hours data, compiled in the CPS-Merged Outgoing Rotation Groups data, has been used by most social scientists who have sought to develop estimates of minimum wage violations since the 1970s.² We follow conventional methodological approaches here (see Methodological Appendix).

In this report, fast food workers are considered those who work in the “[food services and drinking places](#)” industry (8680) and in any of the following occupations: “[combined food prep and serving workers, incl fast food](#)” (4050), “[fast food and counter workers](#)” (4055), “[counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffeeshop](#)” workers (4060), or “[cashiers](#)” (4720).³ We compare the experience of fast food workers to four comparable groups: all other restaurant workers (not in fast food); health care support workers; workers in the retail trade industry; and transportation and warehousing workers.

Findings

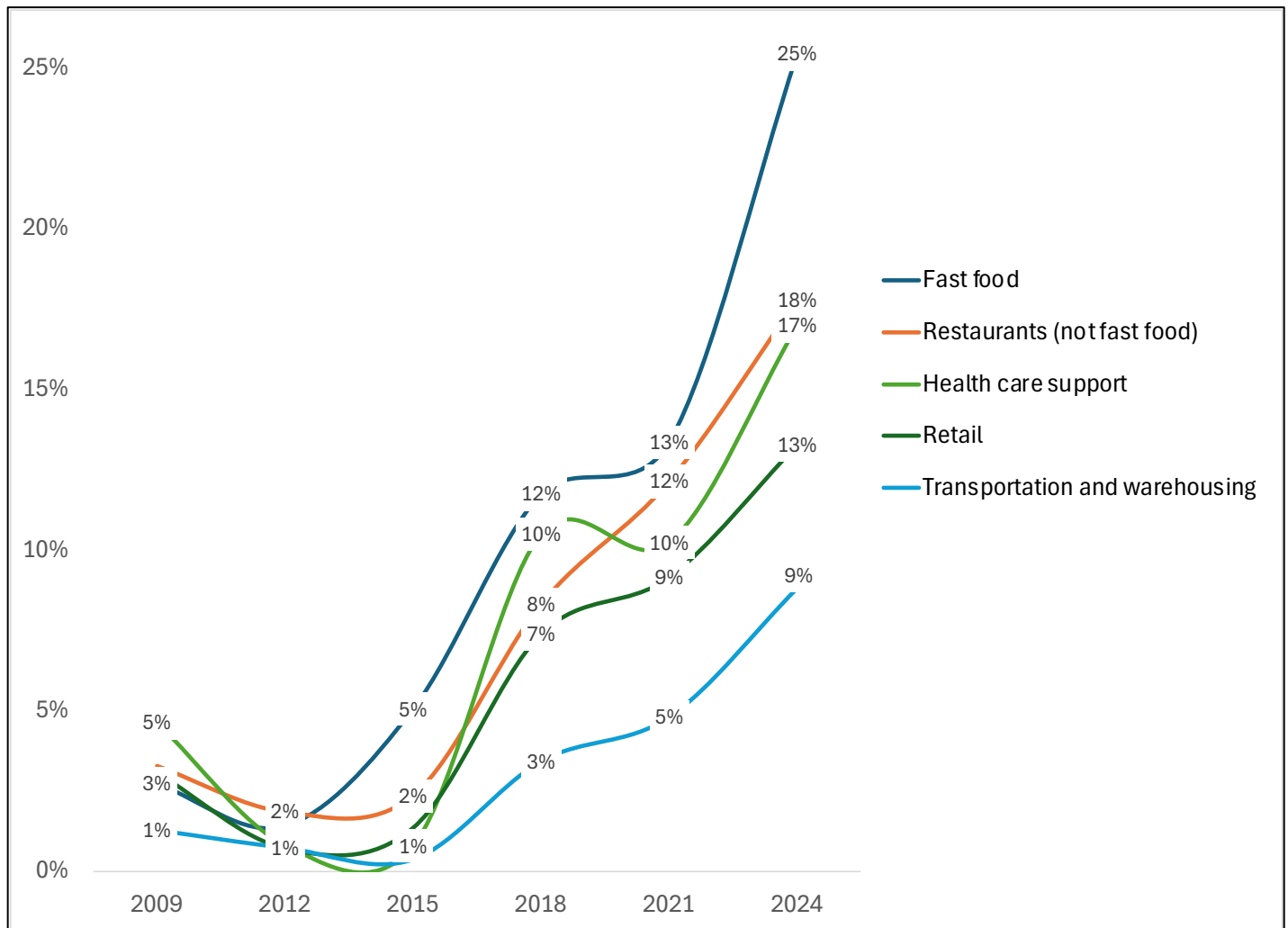
- More and more LA-area fast food workers are experiencing minimum wage violations. One in four fast food workers were paid below the minimum wage in 2024. That’s *eight times* the 3 percent rate in 2009.⁴
- A bigger share of LA-area fast food workers experience this form of wage theft than any of the other industries we analyzed—restaurants (not fast food); health care support; retail; and transportation/warehousing.

- Fast food workers in the LA area lose almost \$3,500 a year—about 16 percent of their income—because employers are paying them below the minimum wage. That adds up to over a quarter of a billion dollars in the last six years.

As illustrated in **Fig 2** below, the violation rate in every industry began to rise when the state minimum wage increased in 2016.⁵ Subsequent annual state minimum wage increases were similarly accompanied by increases in the

incidence of minimum wage underpayment. This correspondence is not surprising: prior research has shown that noncompliance with the minimum wage typically increases along with increases in the statutory minimum wage. This is likely due in part to both the time it takes some employers to adjust to the new wage and the unwillingness of other employers to pay it; it is also a function of the ability of state and local-level enforcement to account for changes in mandate, often with limited and/or stagnant resources.

Fig. 2: Minimum Wage Violation Rates by Industry in Los Angeles Metro Area



Notwithstanding higher violation rates following minimum wage increases, statutory increases have had positive effects on average wages in every industry examined here. **Table 1** shows the change in the average wage by industry between 2009 to 2024. Although average wages in fast food still lag behind comparable industries, fast food workers have seen the strongest wage growth (96%) between 2009 and 2024, notwithstanding their higher rates of wage theft.⁶

Table 1: Average Wage Change by Industry in LA Area from 2009 to 2024

	2009	2024	Rate of change
Fast food	\$9.33	\$18.27	96%
Restaurant	\$11.38	\$19.59	72%
Retail	\$12.94	\$20.60	59%
Health care support	\$13.02	\$19.66	51%
Trans. & warehousing	\$17.22	\$23.81	38%

Table 2 summarizes our population and dollar-value estimates regarding the cost of minimum wage violations to fast food workers in greater Los Angeles. Between 2019 and 2024, an estimated 12,661 fast food workers per year—19% of all fast food workers in the Los Angeles metro area—were paid less than the lowest applicable statutory minimum wage.⁷

These workers lost \$2.53 per hour, on average, which represents 16% of the income to which they were entitled. Over this six-year period, estimated losses totaled over a quarter-billion dollars.

It is important to note that the CPS survey we rely on to generate these estimates contains measurement error (incorrect answers to survey questions) and other sampling limitations. These are problems that affect all survey research. One of the consequences of measurement error in the CPS is that our analyses likely *underestimate* the severity of the problem due to factors including: (a) under-representation of low-wage and undocumented workers in the survey; (b) the tendency of low-income workers to over-report their income, which would result in under-reporting of minimum wage violations; (c) and our use of the lowest applicable minimum wage—the state minimum wage—rather than the often higher city or county minimum wage rates to which many workers are entitled. The Methodological Appendix details the steps we take to address measurement error in our analyses.⁸ All figures, nevertheless, should be interpreted as rough estimates that are likely conservative.

Table 2: Cost of Minimum Wage Violations to LA-area Fast Food Workers, 2019-2024

Total number of fast food workers per year	65,504
Total number of underpaid fast food workers per year	12,661
Share of fast food workers underpaid	19%
Average wage of underpaid fast food worker	\$12.90
Average minimum wage to which entitled	\$15.43
Amount lost per hour	\$2.53
Amount lost per week	\$66.90
Amount lost per year	\$3,479
Share of income lost	16%
Total aggregate amount lost per year	\$44,041,343
Total aggregate amount lost, 2019-2024	\$264,248,061

Conclusion

Minimum wage noncompliance in the Los Angeles fast food industry is a chronic problem that has not improved with increases in the minimum wage.

Many workers [do not complain](#) when they are underpaid (or not paid at all) for their work. This is largely due to a lack of information and understanding of their workplace rights: a recent study found that [88 percent](#) of fast food workers in California lacked a full understanding of their basic rights on the job. Both the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) and the [California Department of Industrial Relations](#) have emphasized the importance of “know your rights” trainings as key tools in the fight to improve compliance with labor laws. By equipping workers with the information, knowledge, and understanding of where to go and what to do when faced with rights violations, [mandatory third-party “know your rights” trainings](#)—like those currently under consideration by the Los Angeles City Council—can empower workers to play a vital role in upholding core workplace standards.

About Us

The Workplace Justice Lab @ Northwestern University (WJL@NU) conducts research on workers’ rights and economic inequality and collaborates with local, state, and federal government agencies as well as worker centers, unions, and legal nonprofits. WJL@NU is part of a multi-institutional partnership that is anchored by the [Workplace Justice Lab @ Rutgers University](#) and includes the [Pilipino Workers Center of Southern California](#).

Daniel J. Galvin is professor of political science, faculty fellow at the Institute for Policy

Research, and director of the Workplace Justice Lab @ Northwestern University.

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Support

We gratefully acknowledge support from Workplace Justice Lab @ Rutgers University, the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, and the Service Employees International Union.

Methodological Appendix

Measuring the scope and depth of “wage theft” is difficult. No single data source systematically and reliably tracks the incidence of wage theft and records the precise amounts of money that are not being paid. Early studies of minimum wage compliance used data provided voluntarily by employers to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but employer-reported data cannot be considered not reliable, as employers who violate the law cannot be trusted to report that information to government agencies.

Workers can report wage theft by filing lawsuits and/or lodging complaints with federal, state, and local enforcement agencies. But lawsuits are often too expensive for minimum wage workers and the costs of litigation frequently exceed the amounts of back pay owed. Complaints are also problematic measures because the workers who are more likely to be exploited are also more likely to be unaware of their right to complain (whether due to language barriers, lack of information and knowledge, or fear of retaliation, termination, or deportation).

Lawsuits and the complaints government agencies receive thus provide inaccurate and unreliable portraits of the actual number of violations. We must therefore turn to alternative methods to more accurately detect and measure violations. Survey data on hours and earnings are invaluable in this regard, as they enable us to estimate the true underlying incidence wage violations indirectly.

Most useful are the Current Population Survey's Merged Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS-MORG) data, which serve as the federal government's primary source of monthly labor force statistics. The CPS is designed to produce reliable estimates at the national, state, and metropolitan levels (for the 12 largest metro areas, including Los Angeles). CPS earnings and hours data, compiled in the CPS-MORG, has been used by most social scientists who have sought to develop estimates of minimum wage violations since the 1970s (Ashenfelter and Smith 1979; Ehrenberg and Schumann 1982; Sellekaerts and Welch 1984; Trejo 1991, 1993; Weil and Pyles 2005; ERG 2014; Galvin 2016; Cooper and Kroeger 2017; Fine, Galvin, Round, and Shepherd 2021; Clemens and Strain 2022; Galvin 2024).

Because the CPS-MORG survey asks workers to report their hourly wages as part of a larger battery of demographic and other neutral questions—and does not mention wage theft, working conditions, or ask any other leading questions about the respondent's industry or occupation—it is safe to assume that respondents are not primed to report lower wages than what they actually earned. Indeed, some research finds that certain respondents tend to report *higher* earnings (Bollinger 1998).

The methodological approach employed here is consistent with previous research (In

particular, Galvin 2016; U.S. Department of Labor 2014; Cooper and Kroeger 2017). A few key points to keep in mind:

Los Angeles. The geographical focus of this study is the [Los Angeles Metropolitan Statistical Area](#) (Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim MSA). This is because the CPS captures a representative sample of the population in the 12 largest metro areas, including Los Angeles, but not necessarily at the city or county level.

Wages. For hourly wages, we use variables that include wages earned from overtime, tips, and commissions. To ensure that our estimates of wage violations do not overstate the incidence or severity of violations, we follow Cooper and Kroeger (2017) in taking the higher of the reported wage (hourly wage or weekly pay divided by hours worked) for hourly workers who reported earning overtime, tips, and commissions.

Calculating minimum wage violations. Minimum wage violations are dichotomous measures of whether an individual's reported hourly wage was lower than the lowest applicable legal minimum wage (e.g., the California state minimum wage for small businesses, since CPS does not identify firm size), not the higher city/county minimum. We use the lowest applicable statutory minimum wage rate for each respondent as of the date (month) effective. The amount of wages lost is likewise calculated based on the lowest applicable minimum wage as of the date (month) effective.

Exemptions. We exclude from the analysis all respondents we can identify as exempt from the state minimum wage. In California, identifiable exemptions include only “outside salespeople,” who account for a minuscule

fraction of the estimated total workforce (.04%). We are unable to identify other exemptions (immediate family members, apprentices, “learners” in their first 160 hours of employment in a new field, and mentally or physically disabled employees).

Survey weights and standard errors. All analyses, including population estimates, use the survey weights suggested by Davern et. al (2007), which are necessary given the sampling method of the CPS.

Measurement error. There is reason to believe that measurement error in the CPS may downward-bias the estimates of minimum wage violations.⁹ First, despite going to great lengths to reach them, both Hispanics (Latinx) and undocumented immigrants are under-represented in the CPS (McKay 1992).¹⁰ Because workers in these groups are at higher risk of experiencing minimum wage violations, the estimates of violations reported here should be considered conservative estimates (McKay 1992; Bernhardt et al. 2009; U.S. Department of Labor 2014). Second, in Bollinger’s study of measurement error in the CPS, he finds a “high over reporting of income for low-income men” driven by “about 10% of the reporters who grossly over report their income,” thus potentially biasing estimates downward even further (Bollinger 1998). Third, CPS data have a shortage of low-wage workers and an excess of high-wage workers relative to comparable survey data like SIPP; one effect of this imbalance could be to underestimate minimum wage violations (Roemer 2002; U.S. Department of Labor 2014). Roemer does find that the CPS reaches more “underground” workers than other large-scale surveys and is less biased than alternatives (2002). But given the high rates of violation discovered in the Bernhardt et al.

(2009) innovative survey of hard-to-reach workers in the “informal” labor market—higher than the estimates presented here—there is reason to suspect that these findings underestimate the prevalence of minimum wage violations across the board.

These considerations notwithstanding, the fact that measurement error surely exists recommends using caution when working with the point estimates reported here.

Although every survey contains measurement error, previous research has shown that measurement error in the CPS-MORG cannot predict key patterns or variations in the incidence of minimum wage underpayment; nor can it account for differences observed across industries, which is of primary interest here (Clemens and Strain 2022). Nevertheless, we take the following steps to address the possibility of measurement error: (1) Our sample includes only hourly workers and workers who report working over 10 hours per week. (2) Rather than calculate minimum wage violations as any reported wage less than the statutory minimum, we provide a \$0.25 buffer to account for rounding errors. (3) Because CPS-MORG tracks where respondents live but not where they work, we use the lowest applicable statutory minimum wage each month (the California state minimum wage for small businesses), not the higher city/county minimum wage to which most workers are actually entitled. (4) Exclude unemployed and self-employed workers; (5) Exclude all observations of workers not specifying hourly/nonhourly status; (6) Exclude respondents with imputed hours.

These steps reduce the likelihood that our estimates overstate the incidence of minimum wage violations. However, they increase the likelihood that our estimates represent

conservative *under*-estimates. True violation rates are likely higher.

Data. We use the CPS-MORG abstracts generated by Economic Policy Institute. 2024. Current Population Survey Extracts, Version 1.0.60, <https://microdata.epi.org>.

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Endnotes

¹ The geographical focus of this study is the [Los Angeles Metropolitan Statistical Area](#).

² See Methodological Appendix.

³ We follow the UC Berkeley Labor Center's [definition](#) of fast food workers. Census codes provided in parentheses. 4055 replaces 4050 and 4060 beginning in 2018. Using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) data, we estimate that within the "restaurants and other food places" industry, virtually all

“combined food prep and serving workers, incl fast food” and “fast food and counter workers” work in the fast food industry, and approximately 72% of “cashiers” in the restaurant industry work in fast food.

⁴ To address sample size limitations, we examine six blocks of years: 2007-2009, 2010-2012, 2013-2015, 2016-2018, 2019-2021, 2022-2024. The year 2024 thus refers to the most recent three years of data (2022-2024) and 2009 refers to 2007-2009.

⁵ The fast food violation rate was not only significantly higher than other industries, but the rate of change over this period of time was much greater as well. The violation rate for fast food workers increased *eight-fold* over this period, as compared to the rate of change in restaurant (four-fold), retail (three-fold), health care support (three-fold), and transportation and warehousing (six-fold).

⁶ After the \$20 fast food minimum wage was introduced in April 2024, the average wage of fast food workers was \$19.06 -- lower than \$20 due to minimum wage violations. For those who were paid at or above the minimum wage, the average wage for fast food workers after April 1, 2024 was \$21.36.

⁷ These estimates include only hourly fast food workers who worked over 10 hours per week in the occupations listed above who earned less than \$0.25 less than the

lowest applicable statutory minimum wage. For more, see the Methodological Appendix.

⁸ Although every survey contains measurement error, Clemens and Strain (2022) demonstrate that measurement error in the CPS cannot predict key patterns or variations in the incidence of minimum wage underpayment; nor can it account for differences observed across industries.

⁹ For an excellent discussion of the advantages and limitations of using the CPS data to estimate minimum wage violations given the existence of measurement error and other issues, see U.S. Department of Labor 2014, Appendix B.

¹⁰ As Bernhardt et al. 2009 write: “standard surveying techniques—phone interviews or census-style door-to-door interviews—rarely are able to fully capture the population that we are most interested in: low- wage workers who may be hard to identify from official databases, who may be vulnerable because of their immigration status, or who are reluctant to take part in a survey because they fear retaliation from their employers. Trust is also an issue when asking for the details about a worker’s job, the wages they receive, whether they are paid off the books or not, and their personal background” (56).

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OUR RIGHTS AT WORK

COOL IT!

**HAZARDOUS HEAT, FAST FOOD &
THE PATH TO A SAFER WORKPLACE**



**Worksafe
California Fast Food Workers Union, SEIU**

August 2025



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Worksafe

Worksafe is a California-based organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the basic right of all people to a safe and healthy workplace.

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<https://worksafe.org/>



California Fast Food Workers Union, SEIU

California Fast Food Workers Union, SEIU unites fast food workers across brands and locations, and it is the first of its kind in the country.

This historic union builds on the 10 years of workers organizing in the state, which began with the Fight for \$15 and a Union. Our Union is fighting to achieve racial and economic justice and transform fast food jobs in the Golden State by fighting for fair pay, safe and healthy workplaces and a voice for all workers in the fast food industry. Through our fight for a voice on the job, we're showing low wage workers everywhere that when we organize, strike, and build a movement, we all can win a seat at the table and improve lives and our communities.

<https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/>

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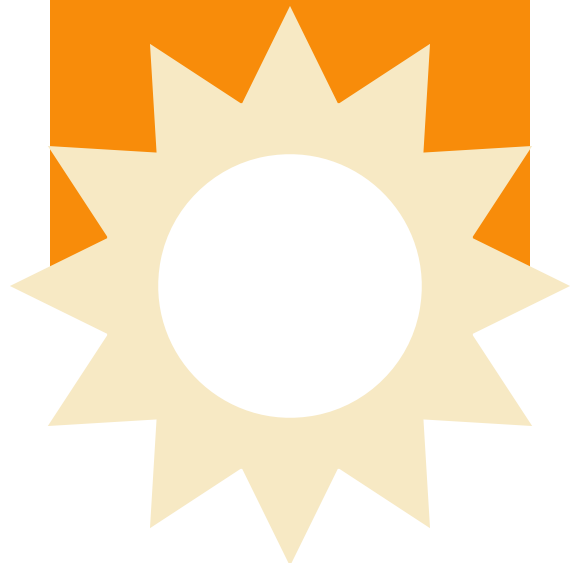
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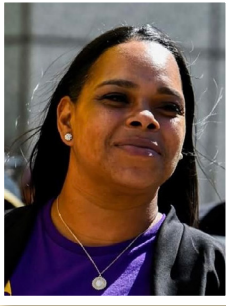
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LETTER FROM ANNEISHA WILLIAMS, CALIFORNIA FAST FOOD COUNCIL MEMBER

The AC in the fast food kitchen where I work hardly blows air and breaks frequently. As recently as July 15, 2025, the temperature in the kitchen was in the 90s and I saw one of the cooks get dizzy from the heat – she had to lean against the wall to stay up. I was worried about her, so I used the cool water from the soda fountain to wet a towel to put on her head under her hat, to try to cool her down. If you faint in the kitchen, you could hit the grill or the fryer, or the very hard floor.

As a member of the state Fast Food Council, I know that the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard went into effect last year requiring employers, including in fast food, to train all workers on how to prevent heat illness, and what to do if we experience symptoms. If temperatures rise, management is supposed to encourage us to stay hydrated and provide water breaks and cooling breaks. Management where I work is not doing any of these things.

Results of a new survey of over 300 fast food workers across California, published here, show that my coworkers and I are not alone. Of fast food workers surveyed, nearly 3 out of 5 experienced excessive heat at work during the past year, and nearly half experienced heat illness symptoms at work such as headaches, dizziness, muscle cramps and fainting. Further, only 9 percent of workers surveyed who experienced excessive heat at work reported that their employers complied with the most basic requirements to prevent heat illness. Though some employers do encourage workers to drink water and provide it, very few provide the time or a cool place to drink it.

Heat illness in fast food is preventable. California fast food workers fought for the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard, and now we are fighting to make its protections real. With fast food employers widely out of compliance, we call on policymakers to support pilot programs in Los Angeles and Santa Clara County to provide us with Know Your Rights trainings by independent organizations we can trust. We need full-day, interactive, paid trainings to provide information on what to do when it gets too hot and we feel sick or face other hazards and violations, and how to get help when management ignores us or retaliates against us.

Action at state and local levels is urgently needed to support California's more than 630,000 fast food workers to access independent Know Your Rights trainings, and to increase workplace health and safety enforcement. With federal workplace health and safety regulations under attack, and fear gripping much of California's fast food workforce, many of whom are immigrants or have foreign-born family members, independent Know Your Rights training is vital to ensure all fast food workers know our rights and how to uphold them.

In unity,



FOREWORD

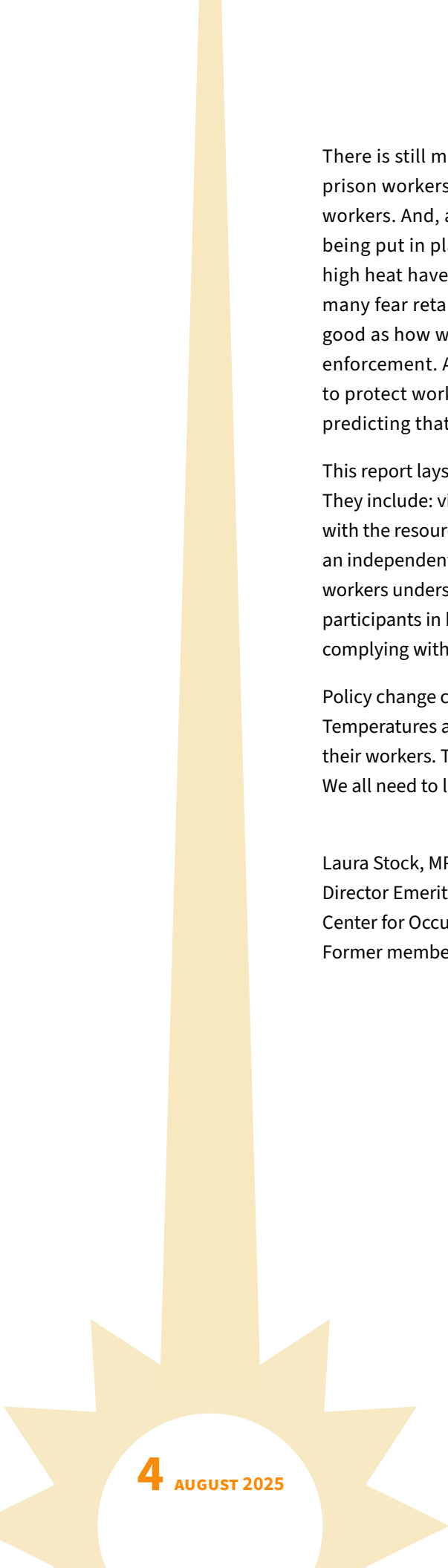
July 23, 2025 was the one-year anniversary of the implementation of the California Indoor Heat Illness Prevention Standard. While this potentially lifesaving regulation was an important and significant victory, it is clear that exposure to extreme heat, both outdoors and indoors, is still putting workers at grave risk of life-threatening heat illness.

This report from WorkSafe and the California Fast Food Workers Union presents results from a July 2025 survey of fast food workers which captured their experiences since the passage of the California regulation. It documents that in many fast food workplaces mandated protections are not still in place. More than half of workers surveyed continue to be exposed to hazardous high temperatures and nearly half report symptoms of heat illness. And, alarmingly, nearly half reported that management had implemented none of the basic safety measures required by the standard.

In this report, fast food workers from across the state also share about the toll that excessive indoor heat continues to take, and their struggles to access the information and training they need to be safe at work. Myno, who worked at Ono Hawaiian BBQ in the City of Los Angeles, describes waking up in the back of an ambulance after passing out from excessive heat in the kitchen and going right back to work, afraid he would get fired for being “too weak” to handle the job. Myno adds that even after that incident, management didn’t fix the heat problem or train workers on what to do if they have symptoms. Auxiliadora, who has a high-risk pregnancy, says she steadies herself against the wall when she gets dizzy from the heat, and that trainings at the El Pollo Loco where she works are just a piece of paper that they have to sign, without any explanation or opportunity to ask questions.

Fast food workers like Myno and Auxiliadora were on the front lines of the campaign that resulted in the passage of the California Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard. As a member of the California Safety and Health Standards Board (the standards setting agency within Cal/OSHA) for 12 years, I had the opportunity to witness the power and bravery of workers who risked retaliation to share their personal experiences. Their testimony moved Board members to understand that protecting workers is a moral issue, and that taking action to support workers is simply the right and only thing to do.

Nowhere was this clearer than during hearings on the indoor heat standard. Workers described their experiences working in extreme heat, in vivid and painful detail – working “in constant motion,” being “soaked in sweat all day,” and often feeling nauseous and dizzy. Because of this powerful testimony, the regulation passed unanimously in June 2024.



There is still much work to be done. The California indoor heat regulation exempts prison workers who have the same exposure to dangerously high heat as other indoor workers. And, as this report documents, in many workplaces protections are not being put in place: workers have not received required training; workers exposed to high heat have not been allowed or encouraged to take cooling/water breaks; and, many fear retaliation for raising concerns. We know that any regulation is only as good as how well it is enforced, and there is an ongoing need to strengthen Cal/OSHA enforcement. At the federal level, indoor heat regulations are still urgently needed to protect workers nationwide. 2024 was the warmest year on record, with scientists predicting that periods of extreme heat will become more intense and more frequent.¹

This report lays out critical recommendations for protecting workers from heat illness. They include: vigorous enforcement of the existing heat regulations; providing Cal/OSHA with the resources to address staffing shortages that limit enforcement; implementing an independent and interactive Know Your Rights training program in languages that workers understand, so that workers have the skills and information needed to be active participants in heat illness prevention and know how to report employers who are not complying with the law; and, enforcing strong anti-retaliation measures.

Policy change can take time, but for fast food workers in California, we have none to waste. Temperatures are rising and employers must comply with the law to protect the lives of their workers. The voices and stories of workers in this report present powerful testimony. We all need to listen and take action to support them.

Laura Stock, MPH
Director Emeritus, Labor Occupational Health Program
Center for Occupational & Environmental Health, UC Berkeley
Former member of Cal/OSHA Standards Board, 2012-24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“On June 27, 2025, I opened the door to start my 4 AM shift, and it felt like there was a fire burning inside the store. A thermometer showed 93 degrees in the kitchen at 4:30 AM, 100 degrees at 7:30 AM, and it felt much hotter when my shift ended around noon,” describes Angelica Hernandez, a cook at McDonald’s in Monterey Park. “I thought I was going to faint, and my coworkers and I were suffering headaches, dizziness, nausea and drenching sweat from the heat,” adds Angelica.

For fast food workers like Angelica, the one-year anniversary of California’s Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard is cause for both celebration and frustration. Under the standard, employers must protect workers from heat illness, a potentially life-threatening workplace hazard, and comply with specific requirements regarding worker training and management response. Yet the promise of these protections remains unfulfilled for many workers, including in fast food.

A new survey on excessive heat in fast food shows that the experiences of Angelica and her coworkers are hardly unique. The survey was taken in July 2025 by 338 workers from over 200 fast food locations across California. Results indicate the fast food industry is widely out of compliance with the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard, with 58 percent of fast food workers surveyed reporting working in excessive heat in the past year, and 48 percent reporting experiencing symptoms of heat illness.

Fast food workers are calling for workers’ rights trainings administered by qualified, independent organizations to ensure workers understand their rights, and how to uphold them. In this high-violation, low-wage industry, such independent trainings are vital to ensure California’s 630,000 fast food workers, the second-largest group of low-wage workers in the state, know what to do if they face unsafe working conditions and other abuses. Federal workplace protections are under attack, and the chilling effects of increased immigration enforcement and fear of employer retaliation deter workers from speaking up about hazards and abuses at work. Independent Know Your Rights trainings will provide California’s fast food workers – largely women and people of color, with over a quarter immigrants² – access to the rights already enacted to protect them.



ONE YEAR AFTER CALIFORNIA’S NEW INDOOR HEAT RULES TOOK EFFECT, ANGELICA & COWORKERS AT MCDONALD’S CONTINUE TO SUFFER EXCESSIVE HEAT AT WORK

“When the AC broke again on June 27, 2025, I picked up a pancake plate and tried to use it as a fan, but the air was so hot it made me hotter. The kitchen was over 100 degrees, the lobby was also terribly hot, and the restroom was worse than the kitchen,” describes Angelica Hernandez, a cook at McDonald’s for over 20 years. “The

manager told us the AC was broken. This is a 24 hour store with 5 grills and 9 fryers. Without functioning AC, the store becomes dangerously hot very quickly.”

“For years, my coworkers and I have reported to management that the AC breaks frequently, making us sick from the heat, and we reported excessive heat incidents to Cal/OSHA in 2021 and 2023. But now, a full year after the new Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard was put in place – clearly setting out how employers are required to protect workers like us from indoor heat illness – many employers, including ours, are still failing to provide the training and protections the law requires, and many workers still don’t know what to do when facing unsafe heat and other hazards at work,” adds Angelica.

Excessive heat exposure can cause immediate symptoms that, if left unaddressed, can progress rapidly from dehydration to heat exhaustion, heat stroke and even death. Beyond these obvious risks, high heat can cause additional serious health impacts. Hotter temperatures significantly increase the likelihood of injury on the job, including from accidents that are not directly related to heat, likely due to heat’s impact on cognition and concentration.³ Based on analysis of workers compensation claims, researchers estimate hotter temperatures caused approximately 360,000 additional injuries in California over the period 2001-2018, or roughly 20,000 per year. Exposure to excessive heat can also lead to flare-ups in chronic conditions such as migraine, arthritis, asthma, kidney disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, as well as worsen mental health, and increase the chance of getting an infection or of having a heart attack.⁴

Compliance and enforcement gaps make independent Know Your Rights training vital to protect worker health and safety

While California’s workplace heat standards establish comprehensive protections for workers, Cal/OSHA faces substantial staffing vacancies and process deficiencies, limiting its ability to ensure employer compliance with heat safety and other standards.⁵ A new state audit published July 17, 2025 found Cal/OSHA had a 32 percent vacancy rate in fiscal 2023-24, with higher rates in certain district offices and inspector positions.⁶ Among the key findings of the audit, which reviewed a sample of complaint and accident files: some complaint and accident inspections took weeks or even months to initiate, and cases were closed without documentation of sufficient reasons for closing them.

The audit report highlights a case in which Cal/OSHA failed to perform an in-person inspection for a second high heat complaint at the same employer, where restaurant kitchen temperatures were allegedly in the 90s due to broken AC, and a worker was taken to the ER by ambulance for medical treatment.⁷ The case audit found that Cal/OSHA had twice sent a letter to the employer instead of inspecting on-site, and that according to case records, the employer did not provide evidence, such as repair invoices, to show that they corrected the hazard.

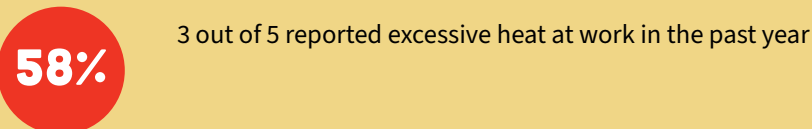
California must invest in strengthening Cal/OSHA's outreach, inspection and enforcement capacity, including anti-retaliation enforcement. In addition, policymakers should support proposed pilot Know Your Rights training programs for fast food workers in the City of Los Angeles and Santa Clara County. Compliance and enforcement gaps make comprehensive, independently-administered Know Your Rights training for fast food workers both urgent and essential.

Such Know Your Rights training empowers workers to advocate for their own safety, equipping them with the potentially life-saving knowledge and know-how to uphold their rights when facing excessive heat and other violations at work. The combination of enhanced enforcement and an empowered, informed workforce can improve compliance across the fast food industry and bolster accountability for employers who violate the law.

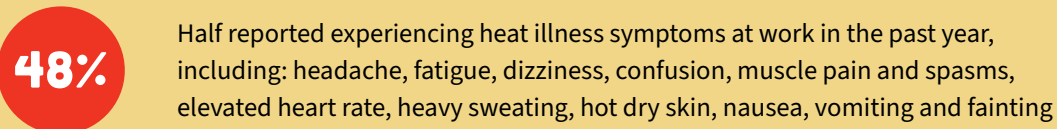
KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Among California fast food workers surveyed about heat at work during the one-year period since the California Indoor Heat Illness Prevention Standard took effect on July 23, 2024:

STILL TOO HOT

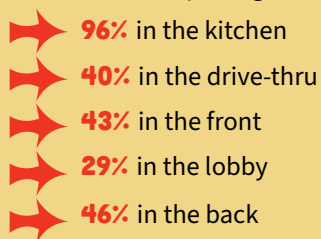


HEADACHES, DIZZINESS, VOMITING AT WORK

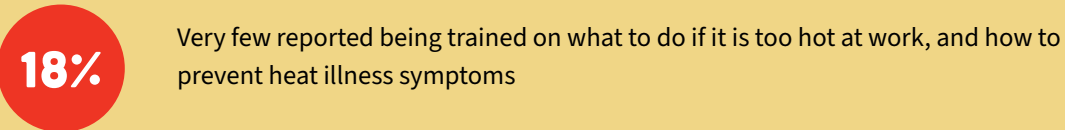


ALL FAST FOOD WORKERS POTENTIALLY AT RISK

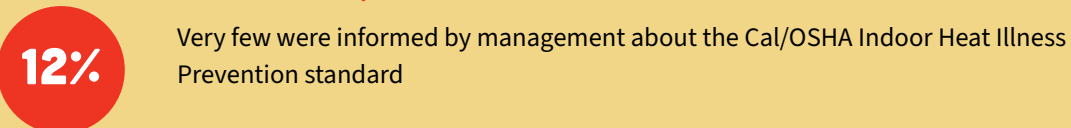
Fast food workers reporting excessive heat said it was too hot:



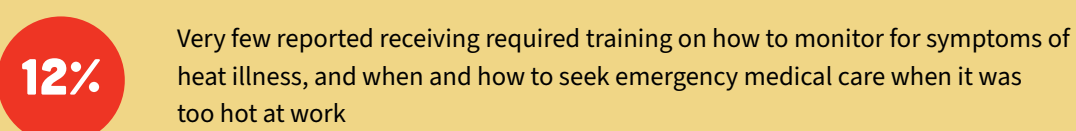
NOT TRAINED WHAT TO DO ABOUT HIGH HEAT



NOT INFORMED ABOUT Cal/OSHA INDOOR HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION STANDARD



NOT TRAINED TO MONITOR FOR SYMPTOMS OR HOW TO SEEK EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE



Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.

WORKERS REPORTING IT WAS TOO HOT AT WORK SAID:

BROKEN AIR CONDITIONING

79%

4 out of 5 reported problems with the AC



55% More than half who reported problems with the AC said management did not fix the AC in a timely manner



50% Half who reported problems with the AC said that management said it was “too expensive” to permanently fix the AC

HOT INSIDE ON HOT DAYS

73%

3 out of 4 said it gets too hot inside the store on hot days or during heat waves

LACK OF URGENT MEDICAL CARE

13%

Very few workers who reported needing urgent care for heat illness said management provided it.

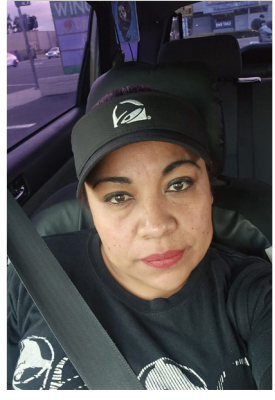
LACK OF WATER AND COOL-DOWN BREAKS

9%

Very few workers said management implemented all of 4 basic Cal/OSHA requirements to prevent heat illness during high heat: encouraging workers to drink water; providing free, clean, cool drinking water; providing a cool-down area; and encouraging workers to take cool-down breaks

46%

Nearly half said management did not implement any of these requirements



I told the manager my coworker was vomiting from the heat and needed to go home, but the manager said there was no one to cover her, so she had to go right back to work. I was sweating through my clothes and felt intense exhaustion.

The lobby was much cooler than the kitchen, but we didn't know management was supposed to allow us to take cool-down breaks to prevent symptoms. We weren't even allowed to take our 10-minute rest breaks that day because there was no one to cover for us.

Many factors contributed to the excessive heat in the kitchen that day. The AC isn't strong enough to cool the kitchen on hot days, and it was unusually hot for March (2025). We were short-staffed, missing a cook, so we had to move very fast to keep up with the orders. It was a weekend and there was a promotion, so it was extra busy, there were lines in the drive-thru and the lobby plus orders from Doordash and UberEats. A busy store means more heat and steam. These factors can happen any time.

I learned from the California Fast Food Workers Union that there is a new law to protect us from heat illness. Management never trained us about the law, or what to do when it is too hot. Fast food workers like us need training on what to do if it gets too hot, or if management ignores us when we are vomiting or having other heat illness symptoms.

-Maria, Taco Bell worker, Los Angeles



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Fast food workplaces should be brought into compliance with the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard, with increased enforcement of the standard and improved mechanisms to protect workers from retaliation for exercising their right to be safe at work.

In addition, independently-administered high-quality Know Your Rights training is urgently needed to give fast food workers the knowledge and know-how to address the hazard of excessive indoor heat. These trainings will also prepare workers to handle other hazards and abuses that are widespread in the fast food industry, such as wage theft, harassment, discrimination and retaliation.⁸

Recommendations:

1

Fast food employers must comply with the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard, including maintaining safe indoor air temperatures, providing required preventive measures such as cool-down breaks and safe, cool, drinkable water at no cost to employees, and providing appropriate emergency response.

2

Enforcement of the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard should be strengthened, including through adequate staffing of Cal/OSHA.

3

Mechanisms to protect workers from retaliation for exercising their rights, including the rights to report health and safety hazards such as excessive heat and to refuse work that is unsafe, should be strengthened at the state and local levels, so that workers are not forced to make impossible choices between their health and safety, and their livelihood.

4

Fast food workers need Know Your Rights training, presented by qualified, independent organizations experienced in providing training to low-income workers, including foreign-born workers. These programs must be presented in-person, in an environment of trust, where workers feel safe asking questions.⁹ Workers need to be paid for one day each year to attend these trainings.

5

Independent, high-quality Know Your Rights training must include key information regarding rights, protections, programs and benefits for all fast food workers, regardless of immigration status.

6

Policymakers should support efforts to pilot independent Know Your Rights training for fast food workers in the City of Los Angeles and Santa Clara County.

ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA FAST FOOD WORKERS SURVEY

The California Fast Food Worker Survey (July 2025) asked about workers' experience of excessive heat at their fast food jobs during the one-year period following the enactment of the Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard, which went into effect on July 23, 2024. The survey was conducted by bilingual outreach

ABOUT HEAT ILLNESS

Heat illness is a serious medical condition caused by exposure to excessive heat and resulting from the body's inability to cope with a particular heat load.¹⁰ Types of heat illness include heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat syncope (fainting), and heat stroke, which can lead to death. The longer a person experiencing heat illness symptoms goes without assistance, the more likely they are to become seriously ill.

Symptoms of heat illness include:

- * Headache
- * Fatigue
- * Dizziness
- * Confusion
- * Muscle pain and spasms
- * Elevated heart rate
- * Heavy sweating
- * Hot/dry skin
- * Nausea/vomiting
- * Fainting/unconsciousness

workers in July 2025, one year after the new indoor heat rules took effect. A total of 338 workers from over 200 fast food locations in 67 cities across California participated in the survey. Respondents work at restaurants in 34 different major fast food brands including McDonald's, Jack In The Box, Burger King, Carl's Jr., Subway, KFC and Taco Bell. Workers were asked a series of in-depth questions about the extent of the problem of excessive heat at work, and about management compliance with the new indoor heat standard, including requirements regarding employer response to excessive heat incidents, and training to prevent and respond to heat illness.¹¹

ABOUT CALIFORNIA FAST FOOD WORKERS

Over 630,000 workers are employed in California's fast food industry as of 2025.¹² Approximately 80 percent of these workers are people of color, 60 percent are Latino/a, and over a quarter are immigrants.¹³ Two out of three are women.¹⁴ California fast food workers comprise the second largest low-wage industry workforce in the state.¹⁵

California fast food workers experience frequent violations of their workplace rights and often face dangerous, unsanitary, and hostile working conditions. In just the past five years, with the support of the California Fast Food Workers Union, workers have filed more than 500 complaints with state and local agencies documenting health and safety hazards, wage theft, civil rights and child labor violations in California's fast food workplaces.¹⁶ Numerous studies confirm that these hazards and abuses are pervasive.¹⁷ Furthermore, workers who exercise their rights or complain about

workplace problems often face firings, cuts to hours, and other disciplinary actions – despite legal prohibitions on retaliation.¹⁸

After more than a decade of organizing to address these issues, including strikes by workers at over 450 fast food locations across California, fast food workers won a landmark victory with the passage of AB 1228 in 2023.¹⁹ This historic law established the California Fast Food Council, which provides workers a seat at the table with employers and government to improve working conditions and standards in the industry, and set a new minimum wage of \$20 per hour in California’s fast food industry, which went into effect April 1, 2024.²⁰

The serious, widespread and preventable hazard of extreme heat in California’s fast food workplaces is among the foremost health and safety problems around which fast food workers have organized to win improvements in their industry.²¹ California fast food workers fought alongside workers in other high risk industries for the Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention Standard, which went into effect July 23, 2024 after years of delays.²²

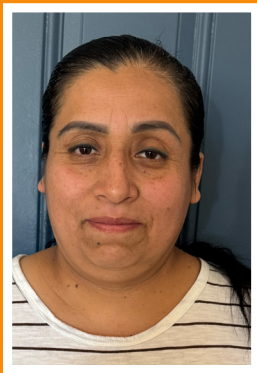
A year after the standard went into effect, fast food workers report that widespread problems with excessive heat at work are ongoing, and that their employers are largely out of compliance with the new rules.²³ Fast food workers are now pressing for urgent action at the state and local levels to support policies that will make these needed protections a reality, including policies to ensure workers have access to independent Know Your Rights trainings that provide them with the necessary information and support to properly address excessive heat and other hazards and abuses at work, and to protect workers from retaliation for reporting these problems.

RISK FACTORS FOR HEAT ILLNESS

Many fast food workers have one or more conditions or risk factors associated with increased vulnerability to excessive heat. These factors include:

- ✱ **Medical conditions** - Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and other health conditions can increase vulnerability to excessive heat, as can taking certain medications.²⁴ Many of these health conditions are overrepresented among people living in poverty, and among Hispanic, Black and immigrant populations, which make up a majority of the fast food workforce.²⁵
- ✱ **Age** - With age, the body is typically less efficient at cooling, increasing vulnerability to excessive heat exposure.²⁶

- ✱ **Pregnancy** - Pregnant workers are more likely to suffer heat illness symptoms, and are more likely to become dehydrated, which also increases vulnerability to heat illness.²⁷ The fast food workforce is predominantly female, and many fast food workers are of child-bearing age.
- ✱ **Arriving at work overheated** - Workers who experience hot commutes walking or biking in the sun, or taking crowded transit, and/or are unable to cool off at home due to lack of affordable, functioning AC, may arrive at work already overheated and more vulnerable to excessive heat exposure at work.
- ✱ **Heat islands** - Many fast food workers face comparatively hotter temperatures at home and in their communities due to the increased temperature effects of urban activity and the built environment, which are felt disproportionately in low-income, immigrant and minority communities.²⁸ The factors that drive temperatures higher in urban areas include the density of people and activities; and the distribution of surfaces that absorb heat, such as roads and cement, versus those that protect from heat, such as trees and green areas.
- ✱ **Homelessness and housing insecurity** - People who lack stable housing are particularly vulnerable to excessive heat due to their lack of access to shelter, cooling systems, and hydration, and many face compounded health risks due to existing chronic conditions or other vulnerabilities associated with homelessness and housing insecurity.²⁹ Fast food workers are overrepresented among California's homeless and housing insecure populations. A 2023 study found that 11 percent of the state's homeless workers were employed in fast food.³⁰



The AC broke, it was over 100 degrees inside the store, and I was so hot I had to put ice water on my body while I worked. Management didn't let us take breaks to drink water or cool down. I have diabetes, so the excessive heat affects me a lot.

-Gilberta, Taco Bell, San Jose

ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA FAST FOOD INDUSTRY

California is home to approximately 47,000 fast food locations – about one out of every six of the industry’s 300,000 establishments nationwide.³¹ California’s fast food industry has grown significantly over the past decade, in terms of both employment and number of establishments.³² Over the same period, many of the fast food industry’s largest corporations have increased prices at rates that outpace inflation.³³ Fast food prices have increased nationwide by 47 percent between 2014 and 2023, compared to 29 percent for all consumer items.³⁴ A 2024 study by the Roosevelt Institute found that the ten largest publicly traded fast food companies had nearly \$21 billion in total operating profits in 2023.³⁵

Under the fast food industry’s franchise business model global corporations set restaurant operating requirements, but individual franchisees are responsible for covering the costs to meet them. This system creates financial disincentives for fast food franchisees to comply with workplace laws, and rewards operators who cut corners on health and safety



The AC was broken for over a month, the heat inside the store - in the 90s and 100s - was making us sick, and we didn’t know what to do.

A friend from another fast food store told us to talk with the California Fast Food Workers Union, and that is how we learned about our rights.

We filed a Cal/OSHA complaint about the broken AC and heat illness, and went on strike about it – then our employer finally brought in some fans and temporary AC, and fixed the broken AC.

All fast food workers need to know about our rights and what to do if management is cutting corners on safety and making us sick.

-Silvia, Taco Bell worker, San Jose

protections or use wage theft and retaliation against workers as tools to control costs.³⁶ The ongoing failure of fast food employers across California to prevent and address the hazard of excessive heat exemplifies this industry-wide culture of noncompliance and the dangers it poses for workers.³⁷

In addition to strengthening enforcement mechanisms at the state and local levels to increase accountability across the board for employers who violate the law, industry-specific policy solutions are needed to ensure that fast food workers know about their workplace rights, know what to do when they experience hazards like excessive heat and other abuses on the job, and are empowered to take action to protect themselves and their coworkers without fear of retaliation.



I've worked in fast food for 11 years. To this day, I remember when I was 17, at my first job, the AC was not working and I was training someone new to work on the grill. When I turned around to look at them, they had passed out on the floor. I didn't know what to do.

-Erika, former fast food worker, Los Angeles

HEAT ILLNESS RISK FACTORS IN THE FAST FOOD INDUSTRY

Excessive indoor heat is a known health and safety hazard in fast food workplaces. Risk factors for excessive heat illness in fast food include equipment and design issues and management practices, such as:

- ✱ **High radiant heat sources** - Grills, fryers and ovens are among the appliances in fast food that can cause high-heat areas.
- ✱ **Air conditioning that is inadequate, broken or turned off** - Older AC units are often weak and vulnerable to breaking, especially during heat waves. Employers may not want to pay for AC repair or replacement, or may limit use to save money.
- ✱ **Dehydration** - Dehydration is a risk factor for heat illness. In fast food, multiple factors may contribute to dehydration, including: lack of access to free, fresh, cool, drinking water; lack of required breaks to drink water and use the restroom; and lack of awareness and training.
- ✱ **Poor ventilation** - Drive-thrus and other work areas may be poorly ventilated. Natural ventilation may not be an option when outdoor temperatures are high, or when windows and doors are kept closed for safety from violence.
- ✱ **Crowded work areas, fast-moving staff** - Work areas are typically small by design, which can intensify heat due to crowding. High levels of exertion, especially during rush times and when staffing levels are low, may also cause body temperatures to increase.
- ✱ **Lack of preventive cool-down breaks** - Fast food workers may not know about preventive cool-down breaks or be allowed to take them, and management often fails to provide a cool area in which to take breaks – as required under the law.
- ✱ **Lack of training on heat illness symptoms, monitoring and response** - Fast food workers often lack knowledge of how to monitor themselves and their coworkers for heat illness symptoms, and lack procedures for reporting symptoms and seeking urgent medical attention.
- ✱ **Lack of acclimatization** - New workers may be assigned to work in high heat areas, such as around grills, fryers and ovens, without the required acclimatization period and monitoring.

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

EXCESSIVE HEAT STILL WIDESPREAD IN FAST FOOD

Excessive heat is a known hazard in fast food workplaces. Fast food workers across California have filed Cal/OSHA complaints documenting temperatures in the 90s and 100s at work, and organized strikes and protests over this hazard.³⁸ In the 2023 California Fast Food Workplace Hazards Worker Survey, published in the report, “¡Aguantate! Heat, hazards and indifference to safety in California’s fast food restaurants,” most fast food workers surveyed reported enduring excessive heat on the job.³⁹

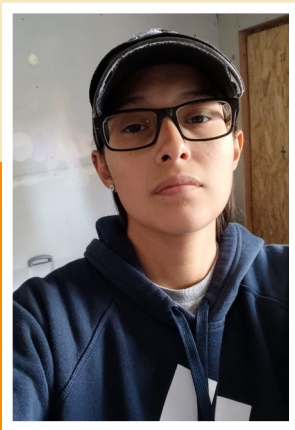
A full year after the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard went into effect on July 23, 2024, fast food workers across California continue to report excessive heat exposure at work.

58%

Nearly 3 out of 5 fast food workers surveyed reported excessive heat at work in the past year, since July 2024



Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.



I didn't see my coworker faint, but I saw her after she hit the ground. I saw the ambulance come and I saw the first responders lifting her up, still unconscious, and taking her to the hospital.

She fainted from excessive heat, because the AC was broken. This happened in early September 2024. She had been working in the lobby, doing maintenance.

I felt angry because I knew it was too hot inside the store, and management knew it was too hot, but they didn't do anything about it, even after my coworker fainted.

We had to keep working with a broken AC for several more days.

-Amalinalli, former McDonald's worker, Los Angeles

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

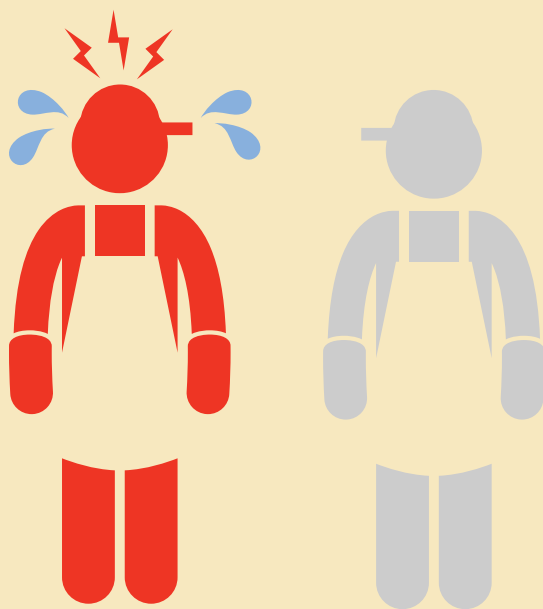
HALF REPORT HEAT ILLNESS SYMPTOMS IN PAST YEAR

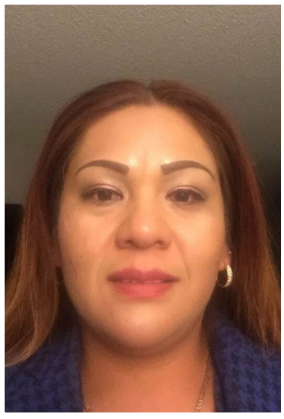
The Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard was put in place to prevent heat illness by requiring employers to maintain safe temperatures and take preventive action if temperatures rise.

A full year after this standard went into effect, fast food workers surveyed report they continue to experience heat illness symptoms at work, such as headache, fatigue, dizziness, confusion, muscle pain and spasms, elevated heart rate, heavy sweating, hot dry skin, nausea, vomiting and fainting.

48%

Half of fast food workers surveyed reported experiencing heat illness symptoms at work in the past year, including headache, fatigue, dizziness, confusion, muscle pain and spasms, elevated heart rate, heavy sweating, hot dry skin, nausea, vomiting and fainting





On July 11, 2024, it was over 90 degrees in the kitchen and I felt like I was suffocating, sweat was dripping off my entire body, my mouth was really dry and I got a bad headache. When I told the shift manager that I had a headache, he said that he did too, “from the heat.”

The McDonald's where I work is inside a Walmart, and there are no windows or doors to the outside that would cool down the kitchen. When customers come in on hot days, they don't sit in the dining area because it is too hot, they just take their food to go.

We know that there is AC in the building because there is a thermostat on the wall, but when I try to turn it on, it doesn't work. When my coworkers and I ask management at this McDonald's to turn on the AC, they say they will ask management at the Walmart about it, but nothing changes. I have asked Walmart management myself if they can turn on the AC in the kitchen, and they always say they will check, but the AC doesn't go on.

Management at this McDonald's did not give us any training on how to prevent heat illness, or what to do if we experience symptoms, and management doesn't allow us to take water breaks or cooling breaks, even when we tell them we are having symptoms of heat illness.

My coworkers and I have been working in excessive heat on hot days the whole 3 years I have been working here, but I didn't know there was anything I could do about it - like contacting Cal/OSHA - until I learned about my rights and what to do from the California Fast Food Workers Union.

-Marbella, McDonald's worker, Gilroy

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

ALL FAST FOOD WORKERS AT RISK OF EXCESSIVE HEAT EXPOSURE

Excessive heat exposure in fast food is not limited to the kitchen, and all fast food workers are potentially at risk.

Fast food workers experiencing excessive heat at work overwhelmingly report excessive heat in fast food kitchens, which often feature radiant heat sources such as grills, fryers and ovens.

Fast food workers surveyed, however, report excessive heat in all parts of the store, including in the drive-thru, lobby, front and back areas of the store. Factors such as poor ventilation and lack of maintenance and repair of AC units contribute to unsafe heat throughout fast food stores.

Fast food workers reporting excessive heat said it was too hot:



96% in the kitchen



40% in the drive-thru



43% in the front



29% in the lobby



46% in the back

Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.



Temperatures in the drive-thru often reach the 90s. I get headaches that won't go away and I feel like vomiting from the heat.

We would tell management all the time that it was too hot and ask to leave the drive-thru window open, but management doesn't let us, they say that the cooler air from outside will cool down the food.

-Yesica, El Pollo Loco worker, Los Angeles

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

MANAGEMENT SAYS FIXING AC PERMANENTLY IS “TOO EXPENSIVE”

Fast food workers experiencing excessive heat at work report that AC units are broken, turned off or insufficiently powerful to cool work areas. Workers also report long waits for repairs, that AC units break down frequently, and that management often states that it is “too expensive” to permanently fix the AC.

Under the Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard and other regulations, employers are required to maintain safe and comfortable indoor air temperatures, and to maintain and use engineering controls, such as air conditioning, to do so. Specifically, employers are required to use engineering controls when the temperature exceeds 87°F when workers are present, or when workers are in a high-radiant heat area and the temperature equals or exceeds 82°F.⁴⁰ In fast food, grills, fryers and ovens are common sources of radiant heat.

Of workers reporting it was too hot at work:

79%

4 out of 5 reported problems with the AC



55%

More than half who reported problems with the AC said management did **not fix the AC in a timely manner**



50%

Half who reported problems with the AC said that management said it was “**too expensive**” to permanently fix the AC

Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.



The AC at this Taco Bell keeps breaking and management says it is too expensive to fix it, so they just fix it temporarily and it breaks again, and we suffer for no good reason.

Last year (2024) we had no AC for 2 days and we felt like we were drowning. It got too hot again in April 2025 and again in mid May. On May 14 by 5 PM, it was so hot I sweated through my undershirt and I had to take it off. I have high blood pressure and I feel terrible when it is too hot. Management didn't give us a fan or tell us to drink water or anything.

I have been working in fast food for 23 years and I haven't had a training about the heat. I didn't know there is a new law to prevent indoor heat illness, I am learning about it now from the Union.

-Dolores, Taco Bell, San Jose

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

TOO HOT AT WORK ON HOT DAYS OR DURING HEAT WAVES

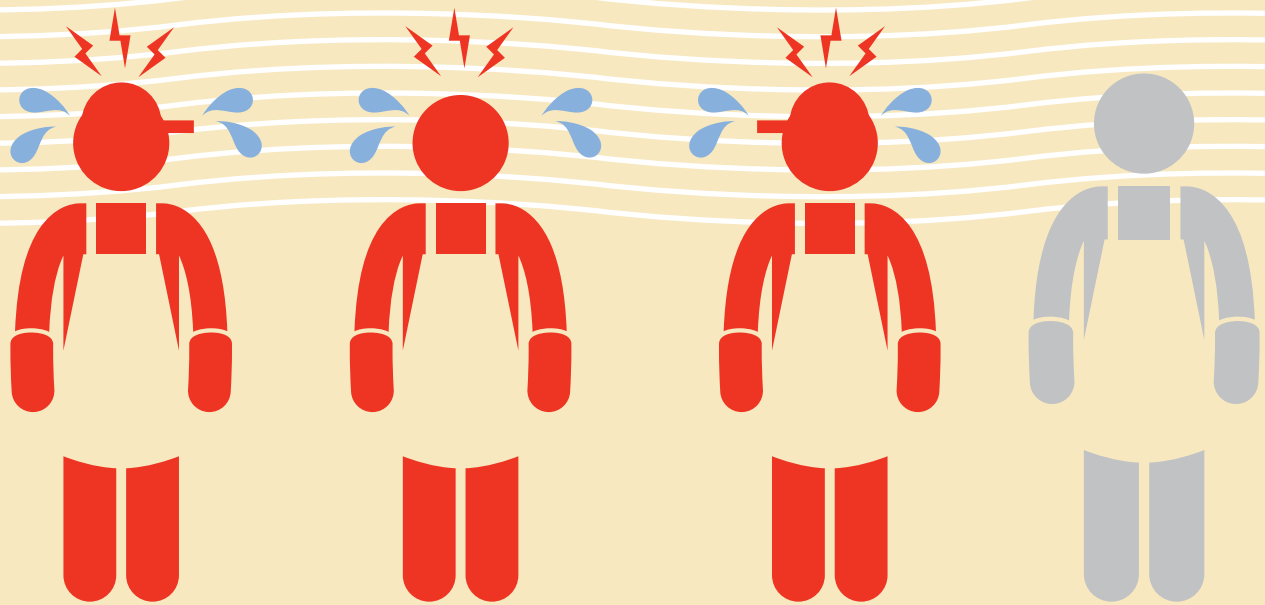
With temperatures rising across the globe and in California, unsafe heat at work is a problem that won't go away on its own.⁴¹

Hot days and heat waves increase the stress on AC units, and many break down. Many fast food workers report that indoor temperatures are higher on hot days.

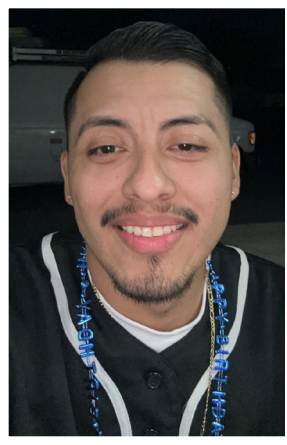
Of workers who reported it was too hot at work:

73%

3 out of 4 said it gets too hot inside the store on hot days or during heat waves



Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.



During the summer, it gets way too hot in the kitchen. Management has us go in the walk-in freezer to cool us down, but I feel like that is not healthy for us.

Sometimes the AC does get fixed, but it breaks again two weeks later.

-Samuel, Taco Bell worker, Alhambra

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

POOR INCIDENT RESPONSE: MANAGEMENT FAILS TO PROVIDE NEEDED URGENT MEDICAL CARE FOR HEAT ILLNESS

Heat illness is dangerous, can progress quickly, and without proper treatment, can cause permanent injury or death.⁴²

The Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard requires that emergency medical services be provided as quickly as possible if a worker suffers from heat illness. Cal/OSHA guidance states:⁴³

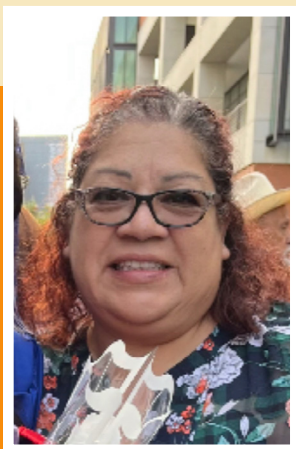
Employers must have specific procedures to ensure that supervisors and workers are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat illness, provide basic first aid (such as cooling towels and shade), obtain emergency medical services, and not allow a worker with signs or symptoms of heat illness to be left alone or sent home without being offered onsite first aid or provided with emergency medical services. Employers must be prepared to transport workers safely to a place where they can be reached by an emergency medical provider when necessary. The goal is to stop the rapid progression to more serious illness, which can include mental confusion, loss of consciousness, seizures, and death.

Of workers reporting it was too hot at work:



13%

Very few workers who reported needing urgent care for heat illness said management provided it



It was terribly hot in the kitchen, my face and lips turned white, I got a bad headache, I was sweating excessively, and I felt like the energy had completely drained from my body and like I was going to faint. My coworker gave me a sports drink with ice and told me to sit down. The manager saw this but she didn't ask if I was okay or say anything.

A few days later, the temperature reached 104.5 in the kitchen by noon. I noticed a young coworker whose skin and lips were pale, and she looked like she was about to faint. I gave her a sports drink with ice and had her sit down. Eventually, our manager sent her home, but before she left I saw her coming out of the bathroom looking like she had just thrown up.

-Martha, Taco Bell worker, Alhambra

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

POOR INCIDENT RESPONSE: MANAGEMENT FAILS TO PROVIDE FREE DRINKING WATER & OTHER PROTOCOLS TO PREVENT HEAT ILLNESS

The Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard requires management to take several specific measures to protect workers from heat illness when temperatures rise at work. These common-sense measures include encouraging workers to drink water, providing free drinking water, encouraging workers to take cool-down breaks so they can drink water and cool down, and providing cool-down areas to do so. Cal/OSHA guidance states:⁴⁴

The standard requires not only that water be provided, but that employers remind and encourage workers to drink it frequently. Workers should be reminded throughout the work shift to drink plenty of water. ...

The employer is required to allow and encourage workers to take a cool-down rest in a cool-down area for a period of no less than five minutes at a time when they feel the need to do so to protect themselves from overheating. Waiting until symptoms appear before taking a cool-down rest may be too late. It is crucial that workers not be rushed while taking the cool-down rest, since the purpose of the cool-down rest is to reduce heat stress on the worker.

Of workers reporting it was too hot at work:



9% Very few workers said management implemented all of 4 basic Cal/OSHA requirements to prevent heat illness during high heat: encouraging workers to drink water; providing free, clean, cool drinking water; providing a cool-down area; and encouraging workers to take cool-down breaks

46% Nearly half said management did not implement any of these requirements

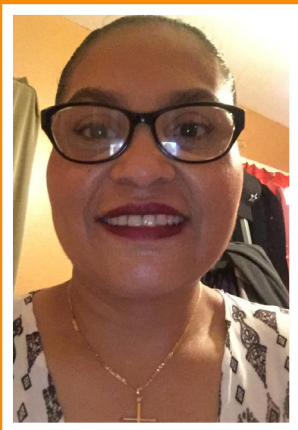
Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.



Sometimes coworkers come to the drive-thru and stick their heads out the window to feel the cool air outside.

It gets very hot in the drive-thru, to the point where I get headaches from the heat. I think the headaches are from dehydration. I go to the back to take a sip of water, but management pressures me to come back to the drive-thru quickly, because there is no one to cover for me.

-Guillermo, El Pollo Loco worker, Los Angeles



When I learned from the Union that when it is too hot in the store we are supposed to have cool-down breaks, I had to laugh, because I can't even imagine such a thing!

-Romualda, Wendy's worker, Oakland

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

WORKERS LACK TRAINING ON HOW TO PREVENT HEAT ILLNESS AND ON STATE REGULATIONS TO PROTECT THEM

Many workers report they are not trained on what to do if temperatures rise at work, or how to prevent heat illness, as required by the Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard. Most workers were not informed by management about this standard, survey results show.

The Cal/OSHA guidance states that Indoor Heat Illness Prevention training must include:⁴⁵

Environmental and personal risk factors for heat illness; the employer's procedures for complying with the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard; the importance of frequent water consumption; the importance and methods of acclimatization; signs and symptoms of the different types of heat illness; the importance of workers immediately reporting to the employer signs and symptoms of heat illness in themselves or co-workers; the employer's procedures for responding to signs and symptoms of heat illness, such as first aid; emergency response procedures, including contacting emergency medical services with clear directions to the worksite; and prior to supervising workers, the supervisor must be trained in all of the information listed above and how to monitor and respond to hot weather reports, if the work area is affected by outdoor temperatures.



18%

Very few fast food workers surveyed reported being trained on what to do if it is too hot at work, and how to prevent heat illness symptoms



12%

Very few fast food workers surveyed were informed by management about the Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard

Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.

Temperatures in the kitchen are in the 90s, and right now the airflow is blocked because the kitchen is surrounded with plastic sheeting due to construction work, concentrating the heat from the grills and ovens, and making the heat problem worse. My coworkers and I get bad headaches and feel nauseated from the heat. We become drenched in sweat, and feel like we can't breathe.

We learned from the California Fast Food Workers Union that new Cal/OSHA regulations took effect in July 2024 to protect workers like us from high heat. Management is required to fix the AC, train us on how to prevent heat illness, and what to do if we experience symptoms. If temperatures in the kitchen rise, management is supposed to encourage us to stay hydrated and provide water breaks and cooling breaks as needed, and take other measures to prevent us from suffering heat illness – but none of that is happening.

After really hot days working in the kitchen, I wake up the next day with body aches, but at my second job at a taqueria, where the AC works, this doesn't happen – it makes a difference when the employer follows the rules about keeping the AC working.

-Virgilio, Burger King worker, Newark

FAST FOOD WORKER HEAT SURVEY RESULTS

WORKERS LACK TRAINING ON HOW TO MONITOR FOR HEAT ILLNESS SYMPTOMS AND SEEK EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE WHEN NEEDED

The Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard requires employers to train workers on how to monitor for symptoms of heat illness, and when and how to seek emergency medical care. The standard also requires employers to monitor workers for symptoms and provide appropriate first aid and emergency response. Cal/OSHA guidance states:⁴⁶

Workers must be monitored during a cool-down rest and asked if they are experiencing any symptoms of heat illness, including simple fatigue. If any signs or symptoms of heat illness are observed or reported, the employer must not order the worker back to work and must continuously observe the worker until the signs and symptoms have gotten better. Common early signs and symptoms of heat illness may include pale skin, heavy sweating, headache, muscle cramps, and fatigue. ...

If heat illness is suspected, appropriate first aid and emergency response procedures (if necessary) should be initiated without delay. No worker with signs or symptoms of heat illness should be left unattended or sent home without being offered onsite first aid or provided emergency medical services.



Very few reported receiving required training on how to monitor for symptoms of heat illness, and when and how to seek emergency medical care, when it was too hot at work

Source: California Fast Food Worker Survey, July 2025.



Since the AC broke at work again, I've been drenched with sweat and had terrible headaches.

In June (2025) management passed around a sheet of paper with information about heat and told all of us to sign it. Management did not explain what was on the paper or provide any real training, but I was able to read a little of what was written and saw that we have the right to drink water and take breaks in a cool place. I asked the manager why we should sign the paper if the AC still does not work, and he laughed but did not respond. I signed the paper because I had to, but I do not feel like I was properly trained on how to stay safe in the heat, or that management is complying with the rules.

Management does not encourage us to drink water on hot days, and recently when I tried to drink more water, the manager became visibly annoyed with me for going to the restroom. Even though we legally have the right to drink water and take cool-down breaks, we are not given the time to take them.

-Erika, El Pollo Loco worker, San Jose

SUMMARY OF INDOOR HEAT PROTECTION RIGHTS AT WORK

A new law, the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention in Indoor Places of Employment standard (California Labor Code Title 8 Section 3396) went into effect on July 23, 2024, setting requirements for employers to establish and implement effective Heat Illness Prevention plans and other requirements to protect most California workers – including fast food workers – from the hazard of excessive indoor heat.⁴⁷

Excessive indoor heat has long been a known health and safety hazard in restaurants. Since 1991, most employers in California, including fast food employers, have been required to address such known workplace hazards in their Injury and Illness Prevention plans under Title 8 Section 3203 of the California Labor Code, enforced by Cal/OSHA.⁴⁸ Under this general standard, employers are required to identify workplace hazards, inform workers about these hazards, take steps to abate the hazards, and train workers in safe practices.

The new Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard goes beyond this general standard with clear requirements specific to the hazard of indoor heat. These requirements include: training workers to prevent, identify, monitor and respond to heat illness symptoms; provision of water and preventive cool-down breaks; tracking indoor temperatures when they start to rise; and the use of mechanical controls (such as air conditioning and ventilation fans) and administrative controls (such as breaks and rotation of assignments) to protect workers from heat illness. New and newly-assigned workers must be allowed to acclimatize to work in high heat areas, and must be monitored for symptoms of heat illness during the acclimatization period.

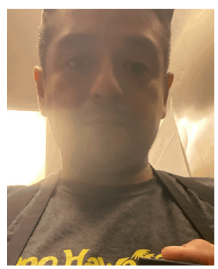
Other existing laws provide additional protections from excessive indoor heat, such as requirements to maintain air conditioning and ventilation equipment in working order.⁴⁹ Laws also prohibit employer retaliation against workers who report health hazards and who refuse to work under unsafe conditions.⁵⁰

INDOOR HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION PLAN

The Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard applies to workplaces where temperatures equal or exceed 82°F when employees are present, such as fast food restaurants.⁵¹ The standard requires that employers establish, implement, and maintain an effective written Heat Illness Prevention Plan.⁵² This plan must be available at the worksite in both English and the language understood by most workers.⁵³ At minimum, the plan must detail specific procedures for providing water, accessing cool-down areas, measuring temperature and heat index, identifying environmental risk factors, implementing control measures, responding to emergencies, and acclimatizing workers.⁵⁴

The regulation requires employers to actively involve employees and their union representatives in the heat safety process.⁵⁵ Employers must establish effective procedures to engage workers and union representatives in planning and conducting temperature measurements, recording heat data, and identifying environmental risk factors that could contribute to heat illness.⁵⁶

Additional requirements are triggered when temperatures or the heat index reach 87°F, or when employees work in an area where the temperature reaches 82°F and there is a source of high radiant heat, such as the areas around grills, fryers and ovens in fast food.⁵⁷ Under these conditions, employers must take action to reduce the temperatures, starting with feasible engineering controls to reduce temperatures below 87°F, or below 82°F for employees working in high radiant heat areas, and then add administrative controls if engineering controls are not enough. Engineering controls include air conditioning, fans and natural ventilation. Administrative controls include rotating employees, scheduling work earlier or later in the day, using work/rest schedules, reducing work intensity or speed, reducing work hours, changing required work clothing, and using relief workers.



Once when I worked at Ono Hawaiian BBQ, I woke up in the back of an ambulance because I fainted in the kitchen from the heat. I was literally making some sauces and woke up in the back of an ambulance.

As soon as I woke up, I got up and left the ambulance and went back to work, because I didn't want management to think I was too weak to handle the job, and I was afraid of getting fired.

That was in November 2021. I continued working at Ono Hawaiian because I needed the job. And it continued to be hot. The grill is 400 degrees, and the line by the steam tables is also hot. When I used to work 12-hour shifts I would go home during my lunch break to change into a fresh uniform because my clothes were drenched with sweat. Sometimes my heart beat so hard it felt like it was going to beat out of my chest. I was getting pulsating headaches and I felt dizzy.

Even after that incident, management didn't fix the heat problem, or train us on what to do if we had symptoms. I didn't know anything about heat safety, or Cal/OSHA, or my rights at work. When I started learning about it from the California Fast Food Workers Union, I brought a thermometer to work and measured the temperature at 101 degrees on June 20, 2024, and I filed an excessive heat complaint with Cal/OSHA a few days later.

-Myno, former Ono Hawaiian worker, Los Angeles

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Employers must provide effective training to both supervisory and non-supervisory employees on several key topics before they begin working in a potentially hot environment.⁵⁸ This includes information about environmental and personal risk factors for heat illness, including how clothing and equipment can increase heat stress.⁵⁹ Workers must be trained on their employer's specific procedures for providing water, cool-down areas, and control measures, as well as their right to exercise these protections without retaliation.⁶⁰

Employees also need to know about the importance of frequent water consumption (up to four cups per hour in hot conditions) and the concept of acclimatization—the body's gradual adaptation to heat that develops over several days of exposure.⁶¹ The training must cover different types of heat illness, symptoms, and appropriate responses, emphasizing that heat illness can quickly progress from mild symptoms to a life-threatening emergency.⁶² Workers must be taught to immediately report symptoms in themselves or coworkers, and supervisors require additional training on implementing protections and responding appropriately when workers show signs of heat-related illness.⁶³

CALIFORNIA INDOOR HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION STANDARD REQUIREMENTS

At workplaces where indoor temperatures equal or exceed 82°F when employees are present, the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard requires employers take action to prevent indoor heat illness, including:⁶⁴

- ✱ Establish a written Heat Illness Prevention Plan
- ✱ Provide effective training on heat illness prevention
- ✱ Provide access to free, fresh, cool drinking water
- ✱ Remind and encourage workers throughout the work shift to drink plenty of water
- ✱ Provide cool-down areas maintained below 82°F
- ✱ Provide preventive cool-down rest breaks when needed, and monitor workers taking cool-down breaks for heat illness symptoms
- ✱ Train workers on emergency response procedures
- ✱ Provide appropriate first aid or emergency response

Additional provisions of the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard apply at workplaces when indoor temperatures equal or exceed 87°F when employees are present, and where workers work in a high radiant heat area (grills, fryers and ovens are sources of radiant heat) and the temperature equals or exceeds 82°F. In these situations, employers are required to:

- ✱ Assess the temperature and maintain accurate records.
- ✱ Reduce temperatures below 87°F, or below 82°F in high radiant heat areas, using feasible ‘engineering controls’ first, such as AC, ventilation fans, exhaust fans, windows and doors.
- ✱ Acclimatize workers and observe workers for signs of heat illness. For newly hired workers and unacclimatized existing workers, the best practice is to gradually increase shift length over the first one to two weeks.
- ✱ When feasible engineering controls are not sufficient to reduce temperatures below 87°F, or below 82°F in high radiant heat areas, use ‘administrative controls’, such as:
 - ⊗ Modify work schedules and activities to times of the day when the temperature is cooler or schedule shorter shifts, especially during heat waves.
 - ⊗ Require mandatory rest breaks in a cooler environment, such as a shady location or an air-conditioned building. The duration of the rest breaks should increase as heat stress rises.
 - ⊗ Schedule work at cooler periods or times of day, such as early morning or late afternoon.
 - ⊗ Rotate job functions among workers to help minimize exertion and heat exposure.
 - ⊗ Reduce work intensity or speed.
 - ⊗ Modify work clothing.
 - ⊗ Mark heat sources clearly so if workers must work nearby, they are aware of the hazards.
 - ⊗ Require workers to work in pairs or groups during extreme heat so they can monitor each other for signs of heat illness.

ENFORCEMENT OF THE INDOOR HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION STANDARD

Cal/OSHA has jurisdiction over nearly every workplace in California, and is responsible for enforcement of most laws related to worker health and safety, including the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard.⁶⁵ Cal/OSHA provides consultation services to help employers understand and comply with standards, conducts inspections, investigates complaints filed by workers, advocates and the public, and takes enforcement actions including issuing citations and fines for violations.⁶⁶ Cal/OSHA has the authority to issue stop-work orders if there is an imminent danger of fatal or serious injuries.

Long-term high vacancy rates at Cal/OSHA, particularly among safety inspectors, limit Cal/OSHA's capacity to fulfill its mission.⁶⁷ In August 2024, Cal/OSHA had a vacancy rate of 46 percent in field enforcement inspector positions, with only one inspector for every 130,000 workers statewide,⁶⁸ resulting in limited capacity to inspect workplaces, including the 47,000 fast food stores located across the state.

The number of Cal/OSHA inspections across industries has been in decline, and response times are inadequate to address severe or imminent hazards. In a July 2025 report, the State Auditor found that Cal/OSHA had taken weeks or even months to initiate inspections, including in situations where it was legally required to act in a timely manner. For example, the report found that although the agency is required to investigate imminent hazard complaints within 24 hours, in 41 percent of the complaints it reviewed, Cal/OSHA had taken over 15 days to initiate a complaint, demonstrating the agency has little capacity to respond to sudden, imminent hazards, such high temperatures in a fast food kitchen during a heat wave. "Starting in 2020, the majority of worker complaints about unsafe or unhealthy conditions resulted in Cal/OSHA merely sending a letter to the employer involved, rather than making an actual work site inspection," reports Garrett Brown, a former Cal/OSHA inspector and advocate for worker health and safety.⁶⁹

The failure to implement the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard by many fast food employers and the limited capacity of Cal/OSHA to respond in a timely manner to worker complaints of excessive heat exposure make it essential that fast food workers be provided with independent Know Your Rights Training, so that fast food workers know what to do when facing excessive heat and other workplace hazards.

California workers have the right to report workplace hazards to their employer and to Cal/OSHA, and to refuse work they think is unsafe.⁷⁰ However, fast food worker survey results and Cal/OSHA retaliation complaints filed by California fast food workers show that workers often fear, and experience, retaliation for reporting health and safety hazards, including excessive heat, or refusing unsafe work. The 2023 California Fast Food Worker Survey found 56 percent of long-time fast food workers surveyed, and 47 percent of all respondents, said they do not feel they can ask management to address health and safety problems without fear of retaliation.⁷¹

While the law prohibits retaliation against workers who report hazards or refuse unsafe work, workers who exercise their rights may well face retaliation, such as cuts in work hours, worse work assignments, and firing. A recent amendment to the California Labor Code shifted the burden of evidence from the employee to the employer in retaliation cases where such actions occur within 90 days of a worker asserting their rights, including under Cal/OSHA, by creating a rebuttable presumption of employer retaliation.⁷²

Nonetheless, fast food workers often face impossible choices between working in unsafe conditions such as extreme heat, and risking their jobs to report such hazards or refuse unsafe work. Independent Know Your Rights training for fast food workers must include information on how to prevent and respond to heat illness and other hazards, and what to do if employers ignore or retaliate against workers, including information on the many venues and procedures for pursuing justice in cases of retaliation. Retaliation is less likely when all workers understand their rights and can exercise them collectively.⁷³

WHEN EVERYTHING GOES RIGHT: LUZ'S STORY

It is 3 pm on a hot Tuesday. About 15 minutes ago, the air conditioning in the kitchen stopped working again. It's 90 degrees outside, and with the heat of the fryers and grill, the kitchen is getting very hot. Luz texts the manager, who is currently off site, to let her know what's happening, and takes a cool-down break in the lobby, which is cooler than the kitchen. She drinks fresh water, and then returns to the kitchen and sends a coworker to take a cool-down break.

The manager reports the problem to get the air conditioning repaired as quickly as possible, and then goes to the store to re-train the workers on heat illness prevention, check the temperature, and monitor the workers for symptoms of heat illness. She reminds Luz and her coworkers about the importance of staying hydrated, reviews the symptoms of heat illness with all workers, in English and Spanish, the languages spoken by the workers, and reminds everyone to keep an eye on each other and report any symptoms right away. One of the workers is designated as the record-keeper to take down the temperature, date and time, and update it every hour.

The manager also reminds everyone to take their meal breaks and rest breaks, and that they can take cool-down breaks in the lobby to cool off and drink water if needed. The workers in the kitchen and the drive-thru, where it is also very hot, take turns taking cool-down breaks until the AC is fixed.



Our family has been thrown into a terrible situation, because management at the McDonald's where I work is retaliating against me for speaking up when the AC didn't work during a heat wave.

It felt like a sauna inside the store. I wanted to throw up from the heat, and my coworkers were suffering with headaches, dizziness and shaking. Management would not even let us take water breaks to stay hydrated. I called the California Fast Food Workers Union to find out what to do for our health and safety. My coworkers and I learned about our rights and filed a complaint with Cal/OSHA about the unsafe heat, and went on strike to demand management fix the AC.

Management did fix the AC, but they also retaliated against me, cutting my schedule from full time down as low as just 2 shifts a week, making it nearly impossible for me and my husband to support our children, who have serious health problems.

Two years ago, my 21-year-old son was diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer, which causes seizures. I work evenings at McDonald's and my husband works days at a packing house, so one of us can always be with our son to help him take his medicine, and to call 911 when he has a seizure. He had brain surgery but the doctors could not remove the whole tumor. Also, our 16-year-old son has a tumor on his face, and is being treated with chemotherapy.

When I asked McDonald's management for my hours back, they told me to be patient and wait, and then they offered me work hours in the morning, when they know I cannot work because I have to be with my son. I have been working at this McDonald's store for 19 years. It is not right that they are retaliating against me and giving my hours to new workers, and then offering me work hours when they know I cannot work.

-Celia, McDonald's worker, Santa Nella

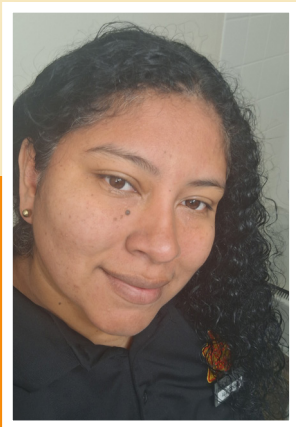
RECOMMENDATIONS

With federal worker health and safety standards under attack, and increased immigration enforcement causing rising fear in the workplace, action is needed at the state and local levels to ensure workers know their rights and how to uphold them. At the same time, temperatures continue to rise globally and in California, and the hazard of indoor heat illness will not go away on its own. Fast food workplaces should be brought into compliance with the Cal/OSHA Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard, with increased enforcement of the standard and improved mechanisms to protect workers from retaliation for exercising their rights to be safe at work.

Independent, high-quality Know Your Rights training is urgently needed to give fast food workers the knowledge and know-how to address the hazard of excessive indoor heat, along with other hazards that put workers' lives and wellbeing at risk. These trainings will also prepare workers facing other types of abuses that are widespread in the fast food industry, such as wage theft, harassment and discrimination.⁷⁴

Recommendations:

- ✱ Fast food employers must comply with the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard, including maintaining safe indoor air temperatures, providing required preventive measures such as cool-down breaks and safe, cool, drinkable water at no cost to employees, and providing appropriate emergency response.
- ✱ Enforcement of the Indoor Heat Illness Prevention standard should be strengthened, including through full staffing of Cal/OSHA.
- ✱ Mechanisms to protect workers from retaliation for exercising their rights, including the rights to report health and safety hazards such as excessive heat and to refuse work that is unsafe, should be strengthened at the state and local levels, so that workers are not forced to make impossible choices between their health and safety, and their livelihood.
- ✱ Fast food workers need Know Your Rights training, presented by qualified, independent organizations experienced in providing training to low-income workers, including foreign-born workers. These programs must be presented in-person, in an environment of trust, where workers feel safe asking questions.⁷⁵ Workers should be paid for one day each year to attend these trainings.
- ✱ Independent, high-quality Know Your Rights training must include key information regarding rights, protections, programs and benefits for all fast food workers, regardless of immigration status.
- ✱ Policymakers should support efforts to pilot independent Know Your Rights trainings for fast food workers in the City of Los Angeles and Santa Clara County.



I have to be extra careful at work because I have a high-risk pregnancy, so when I get really dizzy from the heat, I lean against the wall and drink water so that I don't fall or faint. The AC at this store has been broken for as long as I can remember. Most recently, on July 13, 2025 it got so hot in the kitchen I could barely stand it. I started to sweat a lot, got a headache, and felt restless. We have never been trained on what to do when it is too hot. No one checks if I have heat illness symptoms, or offers to help me.

I have asked management many times why they don't turn on the AC and they say that it is broken, but they do not fix it. Sometimes if it is not too hot outside we open the drive-thru window, which is helpful for the worker at the drive-thru, but the cooler air does not reach the rest of the kitchen.

Sometimes management passes around a paper with a new training, but they do not read it to us or explain what is on it, they just pass it around and tell us to sign it. Trainings should not just be a sheet of paper, they should be interactive so we can ask questions, and frequent, so we don't forget the information.

-Auxiliadora, El Pollo Loco worker, San José

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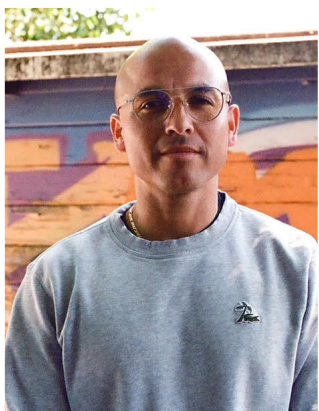
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ABOUT THE ARTIST

My name is Sam Rodriguez and I am an Illustrator born and raised in San José, California. My work spans across music, public art, community, advertising, tech and publishing. I have now been a professional full time artist since 2013, and before that I did it part time since 2002. As a youth, I was a Graffiti artist until later pursuing a BFA in Illustration at California College of the Arts in San Francisco. I have since been working to build a career while remaining in my hometown. I developed a style that was very

influenced by my surroundings here in the Bay Area. I would describe it as a blend of people, lettering and abstract shapes that reveals distinct visual narratives.

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Fair workweek: good for fast food workers and restaurant owners

As the City of Los Angeles considers extending its existing Fair Workweek Ordinance to fast food workers, a review of research on fair workweek laws in California and elsewhere documents that the ordinances work as intended. They increase predictability and reduce the serious harms that unpredictable scheduling wreaks on workers and their families – especially on workers of color. And they help businesses by improving productivity and reducing turnover.

The city's current Fair Workweek Ordinance covers employees of large retailers and aims to provide workers with "stable and predictable schedules, additional opportunities to work, and other employment protections" by requiring employers to post schedules two weeks in advance and to pay workers extra when employers need to change schedules on short notice.¹

Unpredictable schedules wreak havoc on workers and their families

The documented consequences of unstable and unpredictable schedules include:

- **Volatile incomes²** – which make planning difficult and can turn problems like a car needing repair or an illness or injury into a crisis.
- **Going without food or relying on soup kitchens or food banks to eat;** staying in a shelter or an abandoned building; not being able to afford medical treatment; and not being able to pay utility bills.³
- **Lack of childcare** - leaving young children alone or without adult supervision.⁴
- **Poor sleep** for workers⁵ and their children.⁶

These impacts fall disproportionately on workers of color:

- **Workers of color in the service sector are more likely to have unstable schedules** than white workers.⁷
- **Women of color and Latina/Latino workers are the most likely to experience schedule instability.⁸** Over half of fast food workers in California are women of color, and six in 10 are Latina/Latino.⁹
- Workers of color with the same education level working at the exact same companies as white workers "still have more unstable and unpredictable work schedules."¹⁰

Fair workweek laws work

Studies show that fair workweek laws give workers more predictable schedules and reduce these harms:

- **The City of Los Angeles' Fair Workweek law "significantly increased the predictability of work schedules"** for retail workers after it was enacted in 2023, according to researchers at Harvard and the University of Texas.¹¹
- **In Emeryville, the 2017 Fair Workweek Ordinance reduced unpredictable scheduling** for working parents and improved their well-being and sleep, according to a National Bureau of Economic Research paper.¹²

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- **Seattle’s Secure Scheduling Ordinance**, which took effect in 2017,¹³ has not only **increased the predictability of retail and food service workers’ schedule predictability but also “improved subjective well-being, sleep quality, and economic security,”** according to UCSF and Harvard researchers.¹⁴

Workers want predictable schedules not fake “flexibility”

- Three quarters of surveyed service-sector **workers say they would like a more predictable and stable schedule.**¹⁵
- **Los Angeles’ existing fair workweek law preserves the flexibility workers want without penalizing employers.** Employers do not have to pay “predictability pay” when workers request extra hours or ask to swap shifts.¹⁶
- **Research on fair workweek laws in Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia did not find the unintended consequences that industry analysts often predict.** The ordinances have not reduced workers’ hours, decreased hiring or increased use of part-time workers, according to University of Texas and Harvard researchers.¹⁷

Fair workweek laws benefit employers

Predictable scheduling also benefits employers. Benefits include improving productivity and decreasing turnover.

- **A study of over 1,600 chain fast-food restaurants found higher employee turnover in restaurants with variable work schedules.**¹⁸ This is consistent with findings across the service sector that unpredictable and unstable scheduling increases turnover.¹⁹ Lower turnover raises productivity, lowers recruitment and training costs²⁰ and can increase traffic and sales.²¹
- **The fast food restaurant study also found lower profitability in restaurants that use variable schedules** both before and after the COVID 19 pandemic.²²
- **Starbucks found that giving staff more hours and scheduling workers based on their preferences resulted in the chain selling more items per labor hour.**²³ This is consistent with a study by business school researchers of 1.2 million transactions that found higher cashier productivity in grocery stores **with more predictable schedules.**²⁴
- **Restaurants need not incur added administrative costs to comply with the fair workweek law. Compliance with these laws is built into standard restaurant scheduling software.** The software is available from multiple vendors and already used by numerous fast food chains, including giants like Taco Bell, Subway,²⁵ Jack in the Box and McDonald’s²⁶ as well as smaller franchises such as Jamba Juice, Human Bean and Bar Burrito.²⁷

Conclusion:

The studies cited above refute the claim in a recent industry-funded report that fair scheduling will cost L.A. fast food employers tens of millions of dollars.²⁸ The assertion is based on the odd and unlikely assumption that the law will not prompt fast food employers to change their

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scheduling behavior and comply with the law's advance notice requirement.²⁹ The paper assumes that after the law passes, employers will schedule the same share of shifts with short notice as before and will thus owe workers an hour of predictability pay for all of those shifts. That is unlikely given the numerous studies demonstrating that fair workweek laws in L.A. and elsewhere have resulted in more advance notice for schedule changes. The report also fails to consider the increases in productivity and output that fair and predictable scheduling create, as discussed above.



End notes

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⁴ Kristen Harknett, Daniel Schneider and Sigrid Luhr, Who Cares if Parents have Unpredictable Work Schedules?: The Association between Just-in-Time Work Schedules and Child Care Arrangements, *Soc Probl.* 2022 February ; 69(1) (abstract). <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10634609/pdf/nihms-1824498.pdf>

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⁷ Daniel Schneider and Kristen Harknett, "It's About Time: How Work Schedule Instability Matters for Workers, Families, and Racial Inequality," fig. 3. <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/its-about-time-how-work-schedule-instability-matters-for-workers-families-and-racial-inequality/>

⁸ Daniel Schneider and Kristen Harknett, "It's About Time: How Work Schedule Instability Matters for Workers, Families, and Racial Inequality," fig. 3. <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/its-about-time-how-work-schedule-instability-matters-for-workers-families-and-racial-inequality/>

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- ⁹ Kuochih Huang, et al., “The Fast-Food Industry and COVID-19 in Los Angeles,” UCLA Labor Center and Labor Occupational Safety and Health / UC Berkeley Labor Center and Labor Occupational Health Program, February 2021, Table 9. <https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Fast-Food-Industry-and-COVID-19-in-Los-Angeles.pdf>
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- ¹¹ Caleb Kwon and Anath Raman, The Real Effects of Fair Workweek Laws on Work Schedules: Evidence from Los Angeles, October 22, 2023 (abstract). <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4609755>
- ¹² Elizabeth Ananat, Anna Gassman-Pines and John Fitz-Henley II, THE EFFECTS OF THE EMERYVILLE FAIR WORKWEEK ORDINANCE ON THE DAILY LIVES OF LOW-WAGE WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 29792, abstract. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w29792/w29792.pdf
- ¹³ Seattle Office of Labor Standards, Secure Scheduling, retrieved June 25, 2025. <https://www.seattle.gov/laborstandards/ordinances/secure-scheduling>
- ¹⁴ Kristen Harknett, Daniel and Véronique Irwin, Improving health and economic security by reducing work schedule uncertainty Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A, 2021 Oct 19;118(42):e2107828118 (abstract). <https://www.pnas.org/doi/epub/10.1073/pnas.2107828118>
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- ¹⁶ City of Los Angeles Fair Workweek Ordinance, 185.06 (B)(1) “Predictability Pay shall not be required if: An Employee initiates the requested Work Schedule change.” <https://wagesla.lacity.gov/sites/g/files/wph1941/files/2023-03/Fair%20Work%20Week%20Ordinance.pdf>
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- ¹⁹ Daniel Schneider and Kristen Harknett, “It’s About Time: How Work Schedule Instability Matters for Workers, Families, and Racial Inequality,” p. 8. <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/files/2019/10/Its-About-Time-How-Work-Schedule-Instability-Matters-for-Workers-Families-and-Racial-Inequality.pdf>
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- ²² Hyesook Chung, Variable Work Schedules, Unit-Level Turnover, and Profits Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Cornell ILR Research Brief), p. 1. <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files-d8/2023-10/d666a5d2-3ca9-470f-935a-2a7e1d44873e.pdf> The author found smaller decreases in profitability for restaurants using variable scheduling during the plummeting sales of the pandemic. She hypothesized that the higher turnover of variable-scheduling restaurants rates made it easier for them to cut staff in the face of plummeting sales; and that the higher turnover did not increase hiring costs as it does in a normal environment, since there was little to no need for hiring (p. 1.)
- ²³ Starbucks Corporation (SBUX) Q1 2024 Earnings Call Transcript <https://seekingalpha.com/article/4666223-starbucks-corporation-sbux-q1-2024-earnings-call-transcript>
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²⁷ “Trusted by 7,000+ franchises across 150+ franchised brands,” retrieved June 25, 2025. <https://www.7shifts.com/built-for/franchises/> ; “7shifts helps restaurants comply with 'Fair Workweek' laws,” retrieved June 25, 2025. <https://www.7shifts.com/labor-compliance/>

²⁸ Impacts of the proposed Los Angeles fast food ordinance, Oxford Economics, June 10, 2025, p. 1. <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/impacts-of-the-proposed-los-angeles-fast-food-ordinance/>

²⁹ Impacts of the proposed Los Angeles fast food ordinance, Oxford Economics, June 10, 2025, p. 4; Appendix. <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/impacts-of-the-proposed-los-angeles-fast-food-ordinance/>

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Comments for Public Posting: “Knowledge is Power: Workers’ Rights Trainings and the Pathway to Improving Conditions in California’s Fast Food Industry,” Step Forward Foundation and California Fast Food Workers Union, February 2024. Landmark study reveals that the vast majority of California fast-food workers surveyed do not know their rights on the job, and broadly lack information about essential benefits and programs. The report finds that workers’ widespread lack of information about their rights, including the state’s policies around paid sick leave, paid family leave or workers’ compensation, leave workers particularly vulnerable to violations and abuse, and recommends broad policy solutions to ensure all workers in this industry know their rights and how to uphold them.
<https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/wp-content/uploads/KYR-Report-FINAL.pdf>

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Council File No: 19-0229-S2

Comments for Public Posting: “Our Rights at Work: Pregnancy & Parenting in Fast Food,” Legal Aid at Work and California Fast Food Workers Union, March 2025. Report details findings that a majority of California fast food workers surveyed lack awareness of their rights related to pregnancy and parenting, with many experiencing economic instability during pregnancy and the year after childbirth. 86 percent of surveyed fast-food workers worry about taking time off of work for maternity leave or prenatal care due to fear of firing or retaliation, researchers found.
<https://legalaidatwork.org/pregnancyandparentinginfastfood/>

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Comments for Public Posting: “Fast Food Workers on the Brink: Precarious Work and the Path to Stability in California’s Fast Food Industry,” California Fast Food Workers Union, June 2025. Report details the systemic problems of inadequate income, unstable work, and lack of access to workplace rights that California fast food workers face and documents the impacts these realities have on all aspects of workers’ lives—from economic security including access to housing and food, to physical and mental health, to overall social and family wellbeing. Includes results of the 2025 California Fast Food Worker Survey showing widespread struggles with poverty, housing insecurity, and trouble paying for basic necessities. The findings also show that the vast majority of respondents deal with unpredictable schedules and job instability, and worry about schedule changes, hours cuts, and the possibility of losing their jobs without warning.
<https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/wp-content/uploads/SEIU-Fast-Food-workers-on-the-Brink.pdf>

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Comments for Public Posting: “Rats, Roaches and Rot: Worker Rights and the Path to Safer Food in California’s Fast Food Restaurants,” Consumer Federation of America, California Fast Food Workers Union, SEIU, October 2025. A new survey of fast food workers reveals serious food safety problems in California’s fast food industry, with nearly half (47%) of all respondents reporting that they have seen at least one serious food safety problem at their fast food jobs in the past year alone, including problems related to rats, mice, roaches; sewer flooding; expired, rotten or moldy food served to customers; lack of access to toilets; or improper procedures related to handwashing, food storage temperatures or cross-contamination. The Survey also finds that California fast food workers face pressure to work while sick with symptoms of infectious illnesses, despite the widely-known fact that worker illness is a leading cause of foodborne illness outbreaks in restaurants. The report draws on the findings of a July 2025 survey of over 300 fast food workers at more than 200 fast food establishments across California, as well as new focus group research with insights from California fast food workers about their food safety experiences, and findings of a new review of county public health inspection records showing major food safety violations found in fast food restaurants throughout the state and across major brands. <https://californiafastfoodworkersunion.org/wp-content/uploads/Rats-Roaches-and-Rot-LIVE-FINAL.pdf>