



VAL HOYLE
Labor Commissioner

Wage theft in the construction industry

Val Hoyle, Oregon Labor Commissioner

Oregon can be a great place to live and work. We have one of the highest minimum wages in the nation and some of the strongest worker protection laws. Many of these workers' rights are thanks to unions, advocates, and forward-thinking leaders that prioritize our communities - and know that what's good for workers is also good for business.

As Oregon's Labor Commissioner, one of the most important jobs I have is to enforce our wage and hour laws. That means making sure that workers are paid for the hours they work, at the correct hourly rate, and that employers are doing everything they need to do to comply with Oregon laws.

In the construction industry across the country, many employers follow the law. But there are always some contractors and subcontractors who don't – there are shady employers who pay workers off the books, "under the table," or in cash. These practices put workers' unemployment, Social Security, and other benefits in jeopardy, and cheat our state out of the critical tax dollars we need to pay for public services. If they short someone on their hours or don't pay overtime, what can the worker do? Under the table is underhanded. A recent report from the Institute for Construction Economic Research estimates that our communities are losing \$8.4 billion in wage theft tax fraud in the construction industry alone.

My agency enforces the laws that protect us all from companies who aren't doing the right thing. We're focused on strategic enforcement and repeat offenders who are taking advantage of workers and getting an unfair advantage over companies who do the right thing. When contractors take work away from honest companies and pad their own pockets, that's not right.

We have worked very hard over the last year to make the process of reporting violations much easier for Oregonians, despite COVID challenges. We're also looking ahead to community education and outreach to ensure everyone knows their rights at work.

In 2020, we made our complaint forms and information about laws easily accessible online, in clear language that makes sense. And we're already seeing an impact: wage claims in Oregon to our agency went up more than 25% last year alone. We collected \$1,149,584 in wages owed for workers in 2020.

If you aren't being paid for what you're owed - you're not getting overtime or being paid minimum wage, or other violations of worker protections laws – please reach out to us. We can help make things right and ensure your employer isn't taking advantage of other workers.

You can find more information about your rights at work here:

<https://www.oregon.gov/boli/workers/pages/your-rights-at-work.aspx>

You can also contact us directly at help@boli.state.or.us or call 971-673-0761.

