



How the LA City Attorney Can Protect Workers' Rights

Introduction

Workers are the backbone of Los Angeles. For decades, organized labor has fought tirelessly to secure vital rights for workers—including fair wages and benefits, safe working conditions, family and sick leave, and more—ensuring that those who contribute so much are treated with dignity and respect.

Yet, despite these hard-won victories, many businesses prioritize profits over people. Too often, they skirt laws designed to protect workers, targeting those least able to defend themselves. Our legal protections mean little if they are not enforced rigorously and consistently.

This fight has been a huge part of my life's work. Throughout my career, I've worked closely with unions and community organizers to bring workers' rights litigation, and now, I'm helping organize a union in my part-time role as a lecturer in law at USC. During this campaign, I am proud to have earned the endorsements of several unions and labor champions.

Every worker, regardless of their role or background, deserves to work with dignity. The City Attorney's Office plays a critical role in making that a reality, and I am committed to ensuring that these protections are enforced fairly and forcefully.

LA City Attorney's Authority to Protect Workers

In Los Angeles, we have a robust state and local legal framework of worker protections designed to ensure fair compensation and working conditions. These include the City's Minimum Wage Ordinance, which guarantees a living wage above the federal and state minimums, and California's Healthy Workplace, Healthy Family Ordinance, which provides paid sick leave benefits to employees, ensuring they can take time off when ill without risking their jobs or income. Additionally, workers are entitled to legally mandated rest breaks and meal periods to protect their health and well-being during the workday. There are strict state and local rules against wage theft, including unpaid overtime, and illegal deductions. A critical component of these protections addresses worker misclassification—where employers wrongfully label employees as independent contractors to avoid paying benefits and complying with labor protections. Under California's landmark AB 5 law, and reinforced by local ordinances, the "ABC Test" is applied to determine employment status, ensuring that misclassified workers gain access to rightful wages, benefits, and workplace rights. Businesses who use labor contractors who don't pay wages owed can also be held liable under California Labor Code 2810.3.



The Los Angeles City Attorney's Office could play a vital role in investigating and prosecuting violations, helping to safeguard the economic security and dignity of workers throughout the city. Under California's Unfair Competition Law, the City Attorney possesses the authority to initiate civil lawsuits against employers who violate these laws and ordinances. In 2023, California enacted AB allowing public prosecutors, including the LA City Attorney, to directly enforce state labor laws. These enforcement frameworks enable the City Attorney's Office to seek statewide relief, including penalties to hold bad actors accountable, backpay that goes directly back into workers' pockets, and court orders to halt employer misconduct.

When I was at the City Attorney's Office, I actively used this authority to fight for workers:

- **Car Wash Workers' Wage Theft:** I played a role in [securing over \\$1 million in restitution](#) for workers at Silver Lake and Catalina Car Washes who were paid as little as \$4.50 per hour and denied overtime. Workers received between \$10,000 and \$40,000 each in backpay. The settlement also imposed a four-year injunction mandating full compliance with wage-and-hour laws. We identified this case by working directly with grassroots community organizations.
- **Port Truck Drivers' Misclassification:** I helped build the lawsuits to [challenge the misclassification of port truck drivers](#) as independent contractors by companies like CMI Transportation, K&R Transportation, and Cal Cartage Transportation Express. These companies deducted thousands from drivers' paychecks forcing them to take on the costs of leasing their trucks, gas, parking, and repairs, so that they had to work grueling hours just to get by. Our lawsuits aimed to ensure drivers receive the wages, benefits and protections that should have been due to them as employees under California law.

These cases underscore the critical role of the City Attorney's Office in holding employers accountable and protecting workers' rights. My experience demonstrates a commitment to enforcing labor laws and advocating for fair treatment in the workplace.

Combatting Wage Theft

Los Angeles is the capital of wage theft, with workers in the LA area losing up to \$2.5 billion every year. Wage theft takes many forms: failing to pay the minimum wage, denying overtime pay, refusing to compensate workers for all hours worked, and withholding required benefits such as sick leave and rest breaks. It is a pervasive problem that robs workers of their hard-earned income and undermines their ability to support themselves and their families. This issue disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities—often immigrant workers, low-income neighborhoods, and those with limited access to legal resources—making it both an economic and social justice issue.



The ripple effects extend beyond individuals, hurting entire communities as lost wages translate into reduced spending power and increased economic instability.

Combatting wage theft is especially challenging because it is chronically underreported. Many workers fear retaliation or job loss if they speak up, and some don't know where to turn for help. Immigrant communities, in particular, often face language barriers and face threats of retaliation, further complicating reporting and enforcement.

As City Attorney, I am committed to addressing this challenge head-on. That means building meaningful relationships with unions, worker centers, and community organizations to gather the evidence needed to hold bad actors accountable. I will take aggressive legal action against wage theft wherever it occurs, with a particular focus on protecting underserved communities. Most importantly, I will prioritize putting money directly back into workers' pockets—ensuring justice is not just symbolic but tangible.

Addressing Worker Misclassification

Worker misclassification occurs when employers wrongly label employees as independent contractors to evade paying overtime, benefits, and other legal protections. Despite being treated like employees—subject to their control over work hours, tasks, and conditions—these workers are denied the rights and benefits that come with employee status.

Misclassification harms workers by depriving them of fair wages, health benefits, unemployment insurance, and protections like workers' compensation. It also undermines communities by eroding tax revenues and creating unfair competition that pressures law-abiding employers.

As City Attorney, I will send a clear message that worker misclassification will not be tolerated. I will work proactively to ensure that all workers are properly classified and receive the benefits and protections they rightfully deserve. This means enforcing existing laws rigorously, collaborating with labor groups, and holding unscrupulous employers accountable.

Working Directly with Workers & Organizers

Protection workers' rights isn't just about enforcing the law—it's about building strong relationships. Protecting workers requires real, sustained investment across all corners of Los Angeles, especially in communities that are often overlooked.

As City Attorney, I will work directly with unions, worker centers, and community groups to identify issues early and address them proactively. Building trusting relationships with



these partners—where information can be shared and protected to build investigations and support litigation—is essential to creating a fair and just workplace for everyone.

Together, we can ensure that every worker in Los Angeles is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.