



## STOP AND DETER WAGE THEFT

*Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is an Israelite or is a foreigner residing in one of your towns. Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin. — Deuteronomy 24:14-15*

This Labor Day weekend, we honor workers and the important work done in all parts of our society through our work. We reflect on how better to honor work and workers.

One serious problem facing Virginia workers is wage theft — the illegal underpayment on nonpayment of workers' wages. Wage theft happens when workers:

- are not paid the minimum wage (most workers are covered by minimum wage);
- are not paid the overtime premium for hours worked over 40 (many workers are covered by the overtime law but do not get paid according to the law);
- don't receive all their tips (about ten percent of tipped workers get cheated of some of their wages);
- are not paid for all the hours worked (lots of employees work "off the clock," which can really add up for low-wage workers);
- are called independent contractors when they are really employees (cheating them of payroll taxes, unemployment coverage, workers compensation and other protections).

Wage theft hurts workers by cheating them of wages their families need. Wage theft hurts good businesses by putting them at a competitive disadvantage with employers who cheat workers. Wage theft hurts the public by robbing public coffers of needed revenues when unethical employers don't pay their fair share of taxes. One Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission study estimated that the state lost an estimated \$28 million in revenue just from the misclassification of workers as independent contractors instead of employees.

Although most employers pay workers fairly, too many unethical employers are getting away with cheating their workers, because workers don't know their rights, consumers don't know how to make sure workers are paid fairly and Virginia's wage protection laws are woefully inadequate for the crisis of wage theft in the state.

As people of faith, we know that "thou shalt not steal." It is wrong for employers to steal wages from workers. Unfortunately, many people of good will participate in wage theft unknowingly by whom they hire and where they shop.

### What can you do?

- 1) **Pray** for all workers and all employers.
- 2) **Pay your tip in cash** unless you ask and are sure tipped staff will get the credit card tips.
- 3) **Ask how workers are paid** before agreeing to a contracted service. Construction, janitorial service and landscaping are all services know for wage theft. Ask if the business you want to hire pays people as employees (instead of independent contractors).
- 4) **Develop contracted hiring policies** for your congregation or business.
- 5) **Send a letter to your delegate and senator** asking them to strengthen enforcement against wage theft. Get names and addresses from <http://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov>. VICPP is preparing legislation, but letters now would help.

Visit [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org) to sign up for action alerts.