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Denver Labor helps more people than ever because of new wage ordinance

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Published on April 02, 2024

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DENVER – Denver's wage protections are some of the strongest and most effective in the United States, and Denver Labor's results for the recently published 2023 reporting period show the benefits to the whole community.



“Through enforcement and education, we help workers of all income levels receive wages they earned according to law,” Denver Auditor Timothy M. O’Brien, CPA, also help ensure a level playing field for Denver’s vibrant business community.”

In 2023, Denver Labor set new records for restitution, productivity, and community engagement. Our office recovered more than \$2 million for 3,570 workers. We audited about 96,000 payroll records, attended more than 45 community events, updated policies and procedures, and conducted extensive rulemaking to implement and enforce the Civil Wage Theft Ordinance.

	2022	
Restitution recovered	\$1,101,738	\$2,000,000
Workers helped	2,061	1,350
Cases closed	454	350
Penalties issued	\$155,277	\$300,000
Average restitution per worker	\$534.56	\$1,481.52
Payroll records audited as part of prevailing wage enforcement	85,000+	50,000

Compared to our 2022 reporting year, Denver Labor collected 85% more money in restitution, assisted over 1,500 more workers, and closed 29% more cases after unpaid wages.

As required by city ordinance, we issue an annual wage report by the end of May describing our work, results, and impacts from the prior reporting year. This new report covers the reporting period of Nov. 1, 2022, through Oct. 31, 2023. During this time, Denver City Council supported the growth of Denver’s wage protections by passing the Civil Wage Theft Ordinance. Thanks to this continued support, we can help more workers than ever throughout every district in the city.

In 2023, our approach to enforcement included:

- Proactively investigating high-risk industries and workplaces, including home health care operations, construction sites, and staffing agencies.



- Conducting employer-wide investigations.
- Working closely with community organizations, including nonprofits, labor registered neighborhood organizations, and trade and industry groups.
- Collaborating with other government offices to share information and coordinate strategic enforcement.
- Accepting complaints from third parties and anonymous individuals.

The law is making a substantial difference in the lives of working people. At the same time, these successes highlight how much more work must be done. Research indicates that in the City and County of Denver alone, tens of thousands of workers are victims of wage theft every year.

“Our workload expanded nearly 300% last year, and it’s important to take that into account when we work to get cases closed as efficiently and quickly as possible,” Auditor General Cynthia Coffey said. “To achieve the best results for the community, we will need every tool in our toolbox to ensure successful and timely investigations.”

While wage theft can affect anyone, it is not a crime that affects all people the same way. Instead, certain kinds of people are especially vulnerable. Nonunion workers, people of color, women, younger workers, those with limited formal education, and workers with irregular immigration status are more susceptible to abuse than others and far more likely to have their wages stolen.

The Colorado Fiscal Institute estimates that every year, about 440,000 workers lose more than \$728 million to wage theft. Employers are significantly more likely to violate wage rights of women and Latino workers.

For many people the government is their last, best, and only hope for wage justice. But many barriers prevent workers from successfully asserting their own rights. Today it is more important than ever for Denver’s city leaders and agencies to be proactive, innovative, creative and to closely partner with community organizations, industry representatives, and advocates in defense of those in our community who most need help.

2023 Annual Wage Theft Report (<https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Auditors-Office/Denver-Labor/2023-Wage-Theft-Report>)



File a wage complaint (<https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Auditors-Office/Denver-Labor/Civil-Service/Thrift-in-Denver/Wage-Complaint-Form>)

Find business resources (<https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Auditors-Office/Denver-Labor/Small-Business-Resources>)



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