

April 11, 2019

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL APPLAUDS PASSAGE OF BILL TO PROTECT ILLINOIS WORKERS FROM WAGE THEFT AND OTHER UNLAWFUL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today applauded the Illinois Senate for passing legislation that would prevent and remedy wage payment violations and unfair labor practices.

Attorney General Raoul initiated Senate Bill 161 to establish the Worker Protection Unit within the office of the Attorney General, which will be a group of attorneys and staff that will be dedicated to address matters involving laws that protect workers in Illinois. The bill also grants the Attorney General authority to bring legal actions to protect the rights of and interests of Illinois workers and businesses, in conjunction with the Illinois Department of Labor. SB 161 is sponsored by Sen. John Curran and passed the Senate unanimously and will now be considered by the House.

"I have long advocated against wage theft and unlawful employment practices that harm law-abiding employers. As a state senator, I sponsored this bill to give the Attorney General supplemental authority to enforce state wage laws," Raoul said. "I would like to thank my former colleagues in the Senate for passing this bill today that includes the strategic enforcement tools my office needs to protect lawful businesses and the most vulnerable workers."

"This bill benefits workers and law-abiding business alike by curbing unfair labor practices and ensuring that law enforcement and state agencies will work together to prevent and go after these violations," Curran said. "I appreciate the Attorney General's advocacy on behalf of workers across Illinois."

Some Illinois employers make a strategic choice to violate employment laws to gain competitive advantage over law-abiding businesses. Unlawful practices like paying workers less than the legal minimum wage, taking illegal deductions for workers' paychecks and misclassifying employees to avoid wage and labor laws harm workers, businesses, and the Illinois economy.

SB 161 will curb these abuses, recover payments for workers, and prevent the public costs of workplace violations by:

- Codifying a dedicated unit within the Attorney General's office to enforce violations of worker protection laws.
- Providing clear legal authority for the Attorney General to investigate and bring enforcement actions against employers that commit wage theft and other workplace rights violations, such as violations of the Minimum Wage Law, the Wage Payment and Collection Act, and the Employee Classification Act.
- Giving effective tools for the Attorney General to ask a court to enjoin unlawful conduct by employers, impose civil penalties already allowed by statute, and obtain restitution for unpaid workers.
- Creating a Worker Protection Task Force to facilitate information sharing and co-enforcement between local prosecutors, the Attorney General's office, the Illinois Department of Labor, the Illinois Department of Human Rights, the Illinois Department of Employment Security and the Workers' Compensation Commission. The Task Force will also work cooperatively with labor, businesses and community organizations.

Attorney General Raoul partnered with labor leaders in drafting and advocating for this legislation. The bill is also supported by the Chicago Federal of Labor, Laborers International Union – Midwest Region, Local 150 Operating Engineers, Illinois AFL-CIO, Operating Engineers Local 399, Blue Green Alliance, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Teamsters Joint Council 25, Chicago & Cook County Building & Construction Trades, Chicago Area LECET, Illinois State Council of Operating Engineers, SEUI 73, Teamsters Joint Council 25, and the Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services.

“We applaud Attorney General Raoul for his commitment to the passage of this bill and look forward to a continued partnership working to ensure fair treatment for workers,” Alison Howlett Walters, Chicago Laborers District Council LMCC said.

The passage of SB 161 follows Attorney General Raoul’s testimony before the Congressional House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Subcommittee about the wage theft crisis. In his testimony, Raoul highlighted the need for this legislation, as well as other state-level efforts to respond to the crisis of wage theft and the importance of the federal government as a partner in these efforts.