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ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ABOUT WAGE THEFT CRISIS

Attorney General Raoul Highlights State-Level Efforts in Illinois and the Importance of Federal Support

Washington D.C. — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today testified before the Congressional House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Subcommittee on state-level efforts to respond to the crisis of wage theft and the importance of the federal government as a partner in these efforts.

Raoul also spoke about legislation he initiated to codify the Worker Protection Unit within the Attorney General's office. Senate Bill 161 is pending before the Illinois General Assembly and is a vital part of strategic enforcement that is needed to address wage theft and other labor law violations.

"My office fields hundreds of complaints from working people across Illinois who don't know how they will pay their rent or feed their families because they have not been paid all of their wages," Raoul said. "Not only is this unfair to workers, it harms other businesses that do comply with wage laws by making them less able to compete."

The proposed legislation would provide the Attorney General with supplemental authority to pursue 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. The bill would also create 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.

In his testimony, the Attorney General highlighted state-level resource constraints in relation to employees devoted to wage and hour enforcement. Because of this, the federal Department of Labor must continue to be a crucial enforcement partner in combatting wage theft.

Illinois, among other states, has chosen to regulate above the federal standards established by the Fair Labor Standards Act. The Illinois Attorney General's office has joined with these state attorneys general to take significant actions to protect working people in Illinois:

- Conducting - in partnership with the Illinois Department of Labor - a series of investigations and lawsuits related to minimum wage, overtime and discrimination violations in the Chinese-style buffet restaurant industry, resulting in four federal consent decrees, shutting down employment agencies that enable this system and requiring payment of penalties and back wages.
- Reaching a \$1 million settlement with a construction employer that systematically falsified payroll records over a period of years to make it look as though employees were being paid legally required wages.
- Working with employers to change practices that harm low-wage hourly employees such as use of on-call shifts and binding workers to inappropriate non-competes or no-hire agreements.