

May 29, 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 House 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 have the authority to enforce existing laws that protect workers' rights and lawful businesses in Illinois. Senate Bill 161, sponsored by Rep. Jay Hoffman, passed the House with a 99-16 vote and will now be sent to the governor.

"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 members of the House for passing this bill today that includes the strategic enforcement tools my office needs to protect lawful businesses and the most vulnerable workers."

"SB 161 allows for better protection against wage theft and other unlawful employment practices that affect not only workers, but also law-abiding businesses and the Illinois economy as a whole," Hoffman said. "I applaud the Attorney General's commitment to the passage of this bill."

Some Illinois employers make a strategic choice to violate employment laws to gain competitive advantage over employers who follow the law. 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.
- Creating a Worker Protection Task Force to facilitate information sharing and collaboration 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.

Attorney General Raoul partnered with labor leaders and worked with the Illinois Department of Labor in drafting and advocating for this legislation. The bill is supported by the Illinois Department of Labor, Chicago Laborers District Council LMCC, Chicago Federation 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, SEIU 73,

Teamsters Joint Council 25, State Conference of IBEWs and the Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services.

“We appreciate the Attorney General’s advocacy on behalf of workers across Illinois and look forward to a continued partnership working to ensure fair treatment and protection from unfair wages for workers,” Alison Howlett Walters, Chicago Laborers District Council LMCC said.

SB 161 builds on Attorney General Raoul’s efforts to fight unlawful employment practices and the wage theft crisis. In April, Raoul testified 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.