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Somerville Advances Efforts to Protect Workers from Wage Theft

SOMERVILLE, MA – In late October, the City of Somerville took another step toward ensuring that workers receive the wages they have earned. The newly formed Wage Theft Advisory Committee, comprising representatives from labor, business, and municipal government, convened for the first time under a revitalized municipal ordinance to begin developing strategies to ensure that both workers and employers understand their rights and responsibilities under local, state, and federal wage laws.

Under Somerville's wage theft ordinance, employers found by state or federal agencies or the courts to have violated wage and hour laws may face municipal consequences, including the denial, suspension, or revocation of permits and licenses, public financing (known as Tax Increment Financing), and/or municipal contracts.

“We want Somerville to be a model city – where workers receive every penny they earn,” said City Councilor Will Mbah, who represents the City Council on the Committee and is an incoming state representative. “With so many residents needing to work 60 to 80 hours a week just to afford food and rent, workers need and deserve to receive every dollar they have earned.”

Somerville's ordinance applies to employers seeking certain city licenses, permits, and municipal contracts. Businesses applying for city licenses – including restaurants and liquor stores – may be denied a license or have an existing license suspended or revoked if they are found to have violated Massachusetts or federal wage and hour laws.

“When I lead worker rights sessions in Somerville, I constantly hear from residents who had been cheated out of wages by their employers,” said Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, a Committee member who also serves as labor educator at the Mass. Nurses Association. “This ordinance sends a strong message to employers: in Somerville, every worker deserves to be paid the wages they have rightfully earned.”

[PROPOSED QUOTE – COMMITTEE MEMBER #2]

“The Committee will help ensure that employers with a record of wage theft are held accountable while making sure workers understand and can access the protections available to them,” said [NAME], a member of the Wage Theft Advisory Committee. “By bringing labor, business, and municipal representatives together, we can build a stronger system of accountability and prevent future violations.”

The Committee will track employers against whom the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office or the federal Department of Labor has taken enforcement action and help workers navigate the City's wage theft protections.

Employers with a history of wage theft violations may also be required to post a wage bond to help ensure that workers are compensated in the event of future violations. Businesses found to have violated wage and hour laws may additionally be required to prominently display notices informing workers of their rights in the primary languages spoken by their employees.

“Workers should never have to fight to receive the wages they have earned,” said Steven Tolman, the City’s Senior Labor Advisor and a member of the Wage Theft Advisory Committee. “These protections are an important tool for creating a fairer local economy, supporting responsible businesses, and ensuring that all employers play by the same rules.”

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Potential quote: