

## **Stop wage theft in Shelby County!**

It's simple, really. If you work, you should get paid for your work. If you haven't been paid, you should have a way to quickly recover the wages you are owed. The proposed Shelby County wage theft ordinance is a straight-forward solution to this all too common workplace problem - wage theft.

The failure to pay wages is an epidemic. While most employers do right by their workers, too many do not. Being shorted hours, being paid below minimum wage, not being paid overtime, or not receiving a final paycheck are common practices across many industries.

### **Wage theft hurts all Shelby County residents**

When workers' wages are stolen, their bills often go unpaid, their housing is unstable, and their families may even experience hunger. While wage theft is most common among low-wage workers, overtime violations often affect middle-income workers as well.

Right now, business owners who do the right thing are at a serious disadvantage when they have to compete against businesses who steal wages. Businesses that commit wage theft often also do not pay all the taxes that they owe. This means less money to provide the public services we all depend on.

### **Workers aren't adequately protected from wage theft**

There are federal laws against wage theft. But a lack of adequate enforcement leaves Shelby County workers vulnerable to wage theft. The National Employment Law Project's landmark study *Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers* found that in America's major cities, two out of three low-wage workers had experienced wage theft in the previous work week.

Things aren't any better on the state level. In fact, in Tennessee they are worse. Tennessee is just one of five states that have no minimum wage law. The Tennessee Department of Labor cannot collect unpaid wages on behalf of our state's workers except in the narrow instance that an employer has failed to pay a last paycheck.

### **What the wage theft ordinance will do**

If passed, the Shelby County wage theft ordinance will allow workers to recover their stolen wages through a County complaint process. Employers who don't respond to the County's attempts to negotiate a payment could face a mandatory hearing. Employers who are found in violation at the hearing could face paying up to three times the back wages that are owed, as well as paying for the costs of the hearing.

The Shelby County wage theft ordinance is modeled on an ordinance passed unanimously by the Miami-Dade County Commission in 2010. Since the wage theft law was passed in 2010, Miami-Dade County has recovered more than \$400,000 in stolen wages for workers.

## **You can help pass the wage theft ordinance**

Contact your County Commissioners and urge them to vote for the Shelby County wage theft ordinance. Call them at (901) 222-1000 or go to [www.workersinterfaithnetwork.org](http://www.workersinterfaithnetwork.org) to sign a petition.

Volunteers are needed for the Stop Wage Theft campaign. To find out about volunteer opportunities, call Workers Interfaith Network at (901) 332-3570.

### **Workers Interfaith Network**

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