

OPPORTUNITY & PROSPERITY FOR ALL

Get to know **OUR PROJECTS**

Workers' Rights

THE WORKERS' RIGHTS PROJECT wants to ensure all jobs in North Carolina are good jobs, that everyone can take time off from work when they need it, and that they have dignity when out of work.



OUR WORK, OUR IMPACT:

During the ongoing pandemic, low-wage workers in North Carolina faced financial strain because they had lost work or were still working in unsafe environments. Our work pivoted to respond to the crisis quickly.

- Through consistent advocacy with the N.C. Department of Labor, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Governor's office, the Workers' Rights Project **improved the state's efforts to protect essential workers from COVID-19 in the workplace**. We provided technical assistance and input to ensure that guidance issued by DHHS regarding steps employers should take to protect seafood processing workers on H-2B visas and migrant farmworkers from COVID-19 in the workplace and in their housing was as strong as possible. We worked with DHHS to increase the availability of and improve the accessibility of testing for migrant farmworkers, including by bringing more testing to labor camps.
- We advocated with the North Carolina Division of Employment Security, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), and the Governor's office around unemployment insurance, advocating for enforceable workplace protections for essential workers and creating new educational factsheets and trainings about rights related to COVID-19. We successfully advocated for additional unemployment insurance benefits from the state legislature and

Our work involves **THREE MAJOR AREAS**: (1) ensuring that workers' existing rights and workplace protections are recognized and enforced; (2) promoting better jobs that pay living wages, are safe, allow workers to have a healthy work-family balance, and provide adequate benefits to support workers while they are employed as well as unemployed; and (3) building worker power by equipping low-wage essential workers with information and resources needed to enforce their rights, improve their workplaces, and influence policy makers.



ensured that USDOL's interpretation of who qualified for additional benefits was accurate and as broad as possible.

- We received **court approval of two collective and class action settlements** for contingent workers who were victims of wage theft, including workers misclassified as independent contractors rather than employees, were not paid overtime, had illegal deductions



from their pay for workers' compensation insurance, and were not provided required PPE free of charge. These cases **held businesses accountable to ensure workers were paid in compliance with the law and succeeded in paying back wages** to class and collective action members through the settlements.

- The Workers' Rights Project **educated thousands of workers and worker advocates about the impact of COVID-19 on their existing rights** and their expanded rights under the CARES Act, the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act, and pandemic-related changes to unemployment insurance at the state level. We provided virtual trainings in English and Spanish about the right to paid time off, accessing unemployment, health and safety at work, and asking that your rights be recognized at work.

MOVING FORWARD

Enforce existing workplace protections.

- Litigate on behalf of contingent workers and other low-wage workers results to expand protections for contingent workers and deter bad actor employers from avoiding legal protections for contingent workers.
- Litigate against bad actor agricultural employers to win pro-worker legal decisions, damages for farmworkers, and changed employer practices.
- Protect workers from exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and associated negative consequences through administrative advocacy and litigation, if appropriate.
- Ensure the NCDOL enforces OSHA and Wage and Hour rules.
- Ensure workers' rights are addressed before, during, and after natural disasters and pandemics.
- Defend H-2B regulations from efforts by the USDOL and employers to weaken them through rulemaking, administrative guidance, or judicial interpretation.
- Monitor and respond to changes to federal policies impacting low-wage workers and coordinate with partners to push for expanded protections for workers.

Advocate for family-friendly workplaces

- Collaborate with the NC Families Care coalition to advocate for work-family balance policy agenda that includes paid sick days, paid family medical leave, and nondiscrimination for pregnant workers.

- Encourage local communities to adopt policies that promote paid parental leave.
- Support efforts to combat preemption related to living wage, wage theft, and enforcement.
- Expand right to pregnancy accommodations and parental leave to more North Carolinians.
- Grow support for an increase to the state minimum wage.
- Build public awareness and legislative support for legislation to protect migrant farmworkers and improve housing conditions.
- Protect workers from exposure to communicable diseases at work.
- Engage businesses (including NC Chambers of Commerce) in our work on pregnancy accommodations, paid leave, minimum wage, caregiving, work-sharing, and other issues.

Improve unemployment insurance and promote work-sharing

- Help increase support to repair the damage made to the state's unemployment benefits program, enacted by policymakers in 2013, and promote adoption of work-sharing short time compensation.
- Ensure administration of unemployment insurance is more accessible, particularly for women, people of color and limited English proficiency claimants.
- Support efforts of national partners to impact unemployment insurance changes at federal level.

Keep workers informed about their rights

- Ensure North Carolina workers are informed about their legal rights and will be referred to appropriate resources to help enforce their rights.
- Help amplify partners' organizing efforts, including unionization campaigns and efforts to expand collective bargaining rights in North Carolina.
- Ensure immigrant workers have access to accurate information about changes in laws or policies that may impact them as workers, and how to be prepared for those changes.

LET'S WORK TOGETHER to end poverty, build power, and share prosperity across North Carolina!



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