



February 11, 2014

State Senator Beth Bye
State Representative Toni Walker
Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building
Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: State Department of Labor Budget Proposal

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Ana María Rivera Forastieri and I am the Legal and Policy Analyst at Junta for Progressive Action, the oldest Latino community based non-profit organization in the City of New Haven. On behalf of our agency, and the 6,000 individuals and their families that we serve each year, we call for the approval of the Department of Labor's proposal to expand the budget option to hire additional staff for their Wage and Workplace Standards Division. We believe that hiring additional investigators will help create stronger worker protections.

As a community organization, we have seen first-hand the abuses that take place at the workplace. We have seen tens of thousands of dollars stolen by employers because the Department of Labor is significantly understaffed which makes the chances of being investigated very slim, and many of the workers that are affected cannot afford an attorney. We have also seen cases where community members work under deplorable and hazardous conditions, some not even knowing that there are laws that are supposed to protect them. Furthermore, many of the people that we serve are low-income working families, many immigrants, which subject themselves to these abuses for fear of retaliation. There is a sense of helplessness within our community because there is no enforcement attached to these protections.

Between 2009 and today, Junta and other New Haven community groups such as Unidad Latina en Acción have helped workers recover over \$90,000 in wages through organizing workers, advocacy and assistance from Department of Labor. However, as wage theft continues to threaten low-income workers in particular, and we witness the rise in workers not being paid overtime, not being paid minimum wage, and infrequent pay, our resources far outweigh the need. The expansion in the number of wage investigators will broaden the resources for thousands of workers who experience wage theft daily, and will send a message to employers that the state of Connecticut will not tolerate disenfranchisement of its residents.



We fully support the Department of Labor's proposal to hire more investigators. It would be a disservice to the people of Connecticut to turn a blind eye to the very real problem of weak worker protections.

In solidarity,

Ana Maria Rivera Forastieri