

2026 LABOR DAY REPORT

Illinois Department
of Labor



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Message from the Director

The Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL) is proud to present its 2026 Labor Day Report. Illinois has always been and continues to be at the forefront of protecting the rights of working people, from being the first state to offer legal safeguards for child workers, to championing the fight for the 8-hour work day. Labor Day is an opportunity to reflect on that proud history and the work IDOL does every day to uphold these strong worker protections.

In 2026, IDOL secured wins for workers under core wage and hour laws such as the Prevailing Wage Act and Child Labor Law, and also implemented new laws, like one that provides job-protected leave for workers who have a child in the NICU. We have continued to build our mediation and proactive resolution program, which helps to resolve small wage issues faster. IDOL has also partnered with sister agencies to focus on better detection and prevention of severe labor exploitation and labor trafficking; training frontline staff and community partners on how to recognize and respond to signs of labor trafficking.

The Department continues to focus on making our services accessible to all Illinoisans. We have strengthened our partnerships with community organizations and foreign consulates to raise workers' awareness of their rights. By updating and developing a more comprehensive Language Access Plan, the agency has worked to ensure that everyone can access our services in their preferred language. We have also made changes to our website, incorporating more plain language and scenarios to help workers navigate issues they are facing.

As the scope and quantity of worker protection work that the agency is charged with continues to grow, IDOL has been excited to also grow our staff thanks to ongoing support from the Governor's Office and General Assembly. This past November, we moved into a new office space in Chicago that accommodates our bigger team. In partnership with the communities we serve, we look forward to continuing our mission in the year to come, and to ensuring that Illinois continues to be a great place to live and work.



In service,



Jane R. Flanagan
Director

MISSION

The mission of the Illinois Department of Labor is to protect and promote the wages, welfare, working conditions, and safety of Illinois workers by enforcing State labor and employment laws, providing compliance assistance to employers, and increasing public awareness of workplace protections.

Through enforcement, education, and community partnerships, the Department works to ensure that workers are paid what they are owed and that employers who follow the law remain competitive.

VALUES

Justice

Empathy

Teamwork

Knowledge

Adaptability

History of Labor Rights in Illinois

1819	Illinois Apprentice Law provided first protections for minor workers	1963	The US passed the federal Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibited wage disparity based on sex
1884	First convention of the Illinois State Federation of Labor met in Chicago and declared May 1st as the day for workers to demand the 8-hour day	1972	First Illinois minimum wage law passed
1886	The Haymarket Affair occurred in Chicago, where a labor rights protest turned violent. The aftermath of the event led to the creation of the 8-hour workday	1983	Illinois State Labor Relations Act and Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act passed, permitting employees of state and local government units to organize and bargain
1889	Jane Addams & Ellen Gates Starr open Hull House, a social settlement house that provided social and educational services to low-wage and immigrant workers	2003	Illinois passed the Equal Pay Act, which prohibited pay discrimination on the basis of sex or status as an African American and required "equal pay for equal work."
1903	Illinois passed the Child Labor Act of 1903, which established work hours, eliminated child labor at night and required child workers to provide proof that they attended school	2019	Illinois raises minimum wage to \$9.25, the first increase in over a decade, with further increases scheduled
1907	State Department of Factory Inspection created	2023	The One Day Rest in Seven Act (ODRISA) provides employees with the right to a day of rest per week, as well as meal and rest breaks.
1935	Illinois Six Day Work Week Law passed providing a right to a day of rest	2023	The Pay Transparency amendment to the Equal Pay Act of 2003 requires an employer to include pay scale and benefit information in job postings
1936	General Assembly enacted Workmen's Occupational Diseases Act and the Industrial Homework Law	2024	Amendment to the Illinois Child Labor Law sets standards for working conditions for children under 15, including limiting hours of work and updating the list of jobs that minors cannot hold
1938	First Federal Minimum Wage set at \$0.25 per hour	2024	The Paid Leave for All Workers Act went into effect and it grants workers the right to earn up to 40 hours of paid leave annually and they can use this leave for any reason
1943	Illinois Equal Pay for Women Act passed	2025	Illinois' Minimum Wage increased to \$15

Year in Review

9,000+

complaints received

\$3,918,614

collected for workers

3,356

payments issued

\$1,404,400

penalties collected for the department

Wage and Hour Protections

A critical part of IDOL's mission is to protect worker wages and enforce key job protections, such as ensuring that workers are paid their earned wages, receive at least the minimum wage and required overtime, and are provided meal and rest breaks. IDOL received a record number of wage and hour complaints this year, with more than 8,000 complaints filed this year. The Department conducted over 2,900 administrative hearings and pre-hearings to help resolve those complaints, along with 47 mediations and hundreds of informal resolutions to get results more quickly for workers.

Allied Security

IDOL received multiple wage complaints against a security company over several years, suggesting a pattern of wage payment issues. After investigating, IDOL reached an agreement with the employer to pay \$20,000 in backwages to workers and \$37,000 in penalties to the department. Additionally, the employer agreed to create a hotline for employees to raise wage-related issues, and to comply with enhanced monitoring and reporting requirements for two years.

Kordun Express, Inc.

A truck driver alleged that their employer did not pay their final wages of over \$6,000. At an Administrative Hearing, a Judge found that the claimant was owed the back wages and that the employer was not keeping accurate records of the employee's time worked. The employer did not pay and after the case was referred to the Attorney General's Office, the employer paid \$12,941 in back wages and damages to the employee and \$1,357 in penalties to the Department.

Culver's

IDOL received a complaint regarding minors working during the summer at a fast-food restaurant. IDOL found minors working outside of allowable hours, more than 3 hours on school days, more than 5 hours without a meal period, and without an employment certificate on file. After discussions with the employer, IDOL reached a settlement that the employer would provide Child Labor Law training to its staff and pay \$32,000 to the Department.

IDOL is often the only place where individual, hourly workers can go to recover their back wages, such as when they don't receive their final paycheck or don't receive the breaks they are entitled to. Here are a few examples of those "small" cases that can have a big impact on an individual:

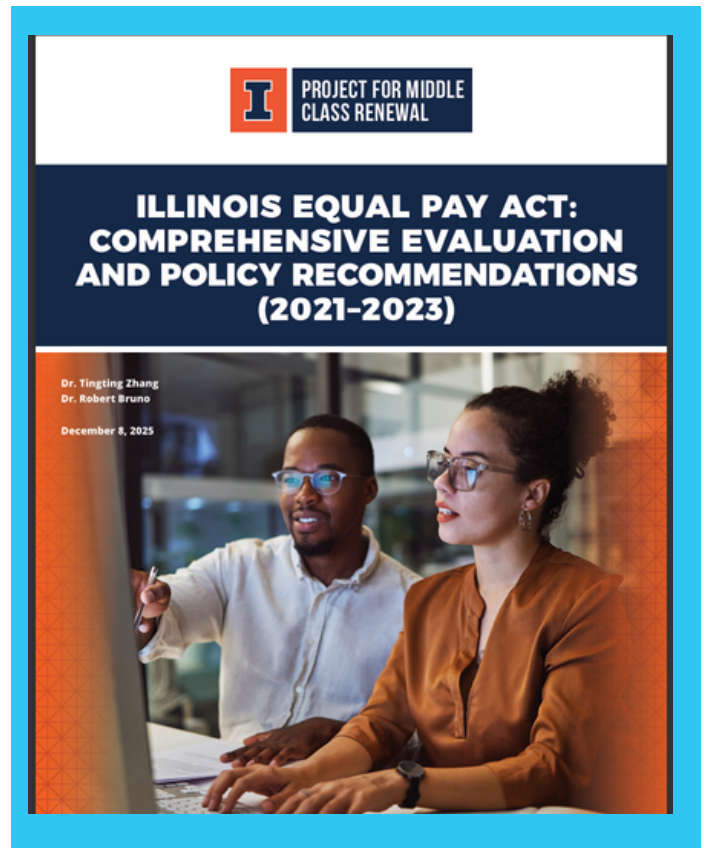
- A housekeeping staff member at a hospital filed a complaint with IDOL stating that they did not receive their earned wages of \$500. After the employer did not pay the administrative judgment, the Attorney General's Office filed to enforce the order, and the employer ultimately settled with the Department by paying the claimant a total \$3,148 in back wages and damages.
- A retail employee filed a complaint that they were being required to work seven days in a row, a potential violation of the One Day Rest in Seven Act. IDOL requested records from the employer and found that several employees had been required to work seven days in a row. The employer paid \$1,200 in damages to three employees and \$1,200 in penalties to the Department.
- A server at a restaurant was not paid for 21 hours of work, totaling \$306. After the employer failed to resolve the matter quickly, an administrative law judge issued an order for backwages and penalties and the employer eventually paid \$3,173 to the employee in backwages and damages.

Equal Pay

The Equal Pay Act promotes gender and racial pay equity by requiring that workers who perform equivalent work are paid the same regardless of gender or race. The Act also bans employers from asking job applicants for their salary history, mandates that employers include salary and benefit information on job postings, and requires large employers to report wage and demographic data to IDOL.

University of Illinois Report

IDOL partnered with the University of Illinois' Project for Middle Class Renewal to conduct data analysis on the wage and demographic data reported to the Department. The [December 2025 report](#) found that Illinois has made measurable progress toward pay equity since expanding pay data reporting requirements under the Equal Pay Act in 2021. The study analyzed more than 3.2 million job records submitted by nearly 4,000 employers between 2021 and 2023. The researchers found that women earn about 91–93 cents for every dollar earned by men in comparable jobs, while Black and Hispanic workers earn roughly 90–94 cents for every dollar earned by White workers after accounting for job, employer, and region. Although gender pay gaps have narrowed in many mid- and high-wage occupations, disparities persist—particularly in lower-wage jobs, downstate Illinois, and among Black and Hispanic workers. This highlights the need for continued transparency and enforcement to build on the state's progress.



Assistant Director Jason Keller presents at a Pay Equity in Illinois Seminar, February 2026

Metz Culinary Management, LLC

The Illinois Department of Labor reached a settlement with a culinary services company after investigating alleged violations of the Illinois Equal Pay Act. The company unlawfully requested job applicants' salary histories by requiring pay stubs before processing employment, and retaliated against an employee who raised concerns about the practice. Under the settlement, Metz will pay \$18,000 in penalties.

Prevailing Wage

The Prevailing Wage Act ensures that laborers, workers, and mechanics on public works projects receive fair compensation for their craft and trade, consistent with local market standards. IDOL made significant recoveries for unpaid wage and benefits for workers under the Act this year, in addition to implementing new statutory amendments.

Premise, Inc.

IDOL recovered more than \$110,000 following an investigation into prevailing wage violations on a solar energy project in Winnebago County. The investigation found that Premise, Inc. failed to pay the required prevailing wage rates to laborers and electricians performing work on the project near Rockford. As a result, the company paid \$91,991.60 in back wages to 27 affected workers and \$18,398.32 in statutory penalties.

Absolute

After an investigation found prevailing wage violations by Absolute Home Improvements & Cleaning Service on a public works project in Lake County, IDOL recovered more than \$67,000 in unpaid prevailing wages for eight employees. The agency's investigation revealed that the employer failed to pay required fringe benefit rates to employees and also did not comply with certified payroll reporting requirements under the Illinois Prevailing Wage Act. In addition to back wage recovery, the employer also paid \$6,794.48 in civil penalties.

General Energy Corp.

Following an investigation spanning five worksites in DuPage County, IDOL identified violations affecting 16 employees. The employer misclassified workers by trade and failed to pay the correct prevailing wage rates, including required fringe benefits. As a result, approximately \$296,000 in unpaid wages and more than \$59,000 in penalties was assessed and collected.

Lake of Egypt Docks

At a single worksite in Jackson County, eight employees were impacted by multiple violations of the Prevailing Wage Act, including trade misclassification, failure to comply with certified payroll reporting requirements, and noncompliance with overtime pay obligations under the Prevailing Wage Act. IDOL determined the owner owed approximately \$75,000 in unpaid wages and assessed nearly \$15,000 in penalties.

Empire Electric

An IDOL investigation in Henry County determined the employer paid the incorrect base and fringe benefit rates to employees and committed a trade classification violation by using an apprentice electrician classification when the employee was not enrolled in a recognized apprenticeship training program. IDOL recovered more than \$28,000 in underpayments for five employees and the employer paid more than \$5,600 in penalties.

Leave Rights

IDOL enforces several laws that protect workers' legal rights to take job-protected leave from work. This year, the Leave Rights Division implemented a new leave law and amendments to an existing law, while also resolving nearly 400 complaints and making workers whole under the state's landmark Paid Leave for All Workers Act.

Family Neonatal Intensive Care Act

The Family Neonatal Intensive Care Leave Act (NICU Leave), which took effect on June 1, 2026, entitles Illinois employees for an employer with 16 or more employees with up to 20 days of unpaid, but job-protected, leave while their child is a patient in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

Victims' Economic Safety & Security Act Amendment

As of January 1, 2026, an amendment to the Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (HB1278) protects employees who use employer-issued devices to record acts of domestic violence, sexual violence, gender violence, or any other crime of violence against themselves or their family or household member. Employers cannot discriminate against employees in such cases, and must allow them to access any relevant photographs, voice or video recordings, sound recordings, or any other digital documents or communications stored on an employer-issued device.

Ottawa Donuts, Inc.

IDOL investigated allegations that an Illinois bakery did not properly inform its employees of their accrual of paid leave time as required under the Paid Leave for All Workers Act, resulting in most employees not using any paid leave time in 2024 or 2025. The employer worked with IDOL to ensure that, moving forward, employees are aware of and able to access their paid leave balances, and the employer paid out a total of approximately \$9,600 to more than 60 employees and more than \$8,000 in penalties to IDOL.

Hellcat Subs LLC

IDOL investigated allegations from a restaurant worker that they were required to find shift coverage before using paid leave time and were not properly compensated for their leave in violation of the Paid Leave for All Workers Act. The employer worked with IDOL to correct their practices and paid out more than \$1,000 to the employee and more than \$7,500 in penalties to IDOL.

I Operations LLC

IDOL investigated allegations that an employer in central Illinois was not providing paid leave to certain employees, which resulted in those employees being unable to take paid time off in accordance with the Paid Leave for All Workers Act. The employer worked with IDOL to correct their policies and ensure employees were able to access their paid leave benefits moving forward, and IDOL collected \$2,500 in penalties.

Illinois OSHA

IL OSHA promotes workplace safety in Illinois by setting and enforcing safety standards for public sector workplaces and by providing free safety and health consultations for small- and medium-sized private businesses. This year, IL OSHA has been working closely with many different employers to keep workers safe.

Cook County Jail

IL OSHA received an employee complaint alleging exposure to hazardous concentrations of smoke while working at the Cook County Jail, one of the largest single-site county jail in the country. After a detailed and complex inspection process, IL OSHA issued a violation, finding that the employer did not provide the proper, suitable, and applicable respiratory protection equipment that was necessary to protect the health of employees. The employer is now working to abate the hazard by implementing several measures including evaluating respiratory protection equipment for employees.

Village of Pawnee

While driving through the Village of Pawnee on the way back from an inspection, OSHA staff noticed an open trench that presented several safety concerns and stopped to speak with the workers on site. The trench then partially collapsed. Fortunately, no one was injured. IL OSHA issued several violations regarding improper trenching and confined space procedures. The employer cooperated and ceased operations until they implemented the new safety programs and procedures.



The Illinois Department of Labor's (IDOL) On-Site Safety and Health Consultation Program (On-Site) is proud to announce the City of Freeport Public Works Department has successfully achieved Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP) status.

SHARP recognizes small- and medium-sized employers who operate an exemplary injury and illness prevention program. Acceptance of a worksite into SHARP is an achievement of status that singles out a worksite among its peers as a model for worksite safety and health.

The Freeport Public Works Department is the first of its kind to achieve SHARP status in Illinois and is among 15 public works/street departments that have achieved SHARP status nationwide.

The City of Freeport Public Works Department serves the community through its street, water, and wastewater operations that involve high-risk activities such as paving, traffic control, trenching and excavation, snow removal, and chemical storage. Beginning in 2022, the city partnered with IDOL's On-Site program to conduct safety and health visits, correct hazards, and provide training for employees across departments.

Amusement Ride & Attraction Safety

New Permitting Process

The Amusement Ride and Attraction Safety Division (ARAS) annually inspects amusement rides and attractions open to the public to ensure they meet safety standards, including criminal history records checks and sex offender registry checks on carnival workers employed in Illinois. All rides permitted are insured, inspected, and meet applicable safety standards before they are allowed to operate in Illinois.

Since launching in January 2025, the Amusement Ride and Attraction Safety Division's online application portal has significantly expanded its functionality, making it easier for amusement and attraction owners and operators to request and manage the permit process with IDOL.

Applicants can now submit permit applications, upload proof of insurance and required third-party testing reports, and pay fees—all through one centralized system. New inspection reports are available instantaneously through the portal, while historical inspection reports dating back more than a decade allow ride owners and operators to track the inspection history of their attractions. Fines and fees can also be assessed through the portal, further streamlining the process.

By bringing these services together in one location, the portal saves applicants time while improving efficiency throughout the permitting and inspection process. For the 2026 permit year alone, more than 3,500 inspection reports have been entered into the system and made available to applicants and permit holders.



Six Flags Inspection , Spring 2026

Fun City Adventure Park

When IDOL staff arrived at Fun City in Algonquin for a routine inspection, they found a ride that had been operating for 147 days without proper permits. IDOL reached a settlement with the employer that includes reporting requirements and monitoring during the abatement period which will result in a safer park for the public.

4,484

Inspections conducted in 2025

Improving Access to IDOL Services



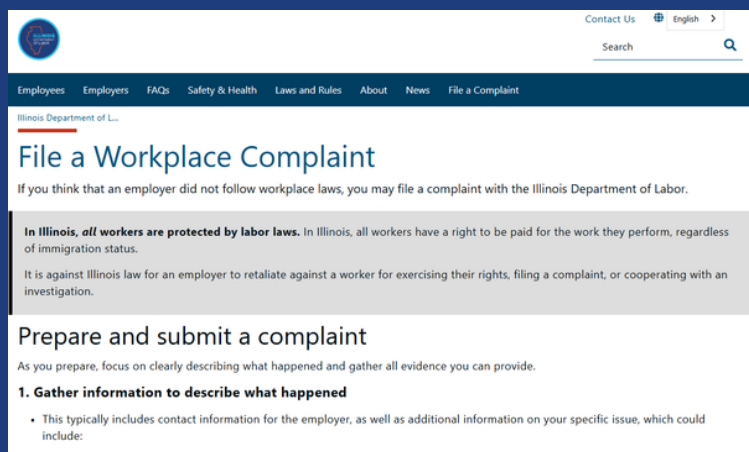
Building on that success, we have continued working closely with the Illinois Digital Service team to incorporate feedback from our stakeholders to reimagine our homepage. To create a welcoming and accessible entry point to the services and resources our users are looking for, these updates will focus on clearer organization, simplified language, and a layout that supports easier navigation. With these improvements, we aim to deliver a user-centered experience that better reflects our commitment to serving the public efficiently and transparently.

Language Access

Language access is essential to ensuring that all individuals can understand their rights and have meaningful access to services and activities provided by the Illinois Department of Labor, regardless of the language they speak. An individual may indicate their language of preference, and our staff will be ready to identify language barriers and offer IDOL's free language services to anyone who needs them. Read more about our [Language Access Plan here](#).

Website Redesign

IDOL has been focused on improving the overall user experience of our webpage to make it clearer, friendlier, and easier to navigate for the public. We began this effort by working with the Illinois Digital Service team to redesign the "File a Complaint" page, streamlining its structure to make it easier for individuals to find the information they need and complete the complaint process more efficiently.



Outreach and Education

Over the past year, IDOL's outreach and education work has continued to grow, ensuring that workers and employers across Illinois have clear and reliable information about their labor rights and obligations. Agency staff traveled throughout the state to build and strengthen relationships with organizations that help us reach both rural and urban communities. Our outreach strategy has included "Know Your Labor Rights" workshops offered both in person and virtually, live presentations on social media platforms, and tailored sessions for community groups, employers, and consulates based on the topics most relevant to their needs.

The Department's outreach and education sessions cover a wide range of labor-related topics, including minimum wage, wage protections, wage theft, child labor law, leave protections, and the process for filing complaints. Every presentation is customized for its audience, ensuring the information is clear, actionable, and responsive to the communities we serve. During these sessions, we also emphasize critical protections related to retaliation, helping workers understand not just their rights, but how to safely exercise them.

Throughout the year, IDOL delivered more than 60 workshops and presentations across Illinois, deepening our connections with existing partners while forming new collaborations along the way. Additionally, our presence at community events, cultural gatherings, and tabling opportunities allowed us to reach diverse audiences and share essential information about labor laws in the state.

These efforts reflect our continued commitment to educating workers, supporting employers, and fostering trusted relationships statewide. As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to expanding our reach, strengthening partnerships, and making labor rights education more accessible to every community in Illinois.



Resource Fair, Fall 2025



Career & Resource Fair, Winter 25-26



Director Jane Flanagan speaking at a labor trafficking event hosted by the Chicago Federation of Labor, Summer 2026

Contact Us



Email

✉ DOL.Questions@Illinois.gov

Website

🌐 labor.illinois.gov

Springfield Office

🏠 524 S. 2nd Street, Suite 400
Springfield, IL 62701
☎ (217) 782-6206
Fax: (217) 782-0596

Chicago Office

🏠 115 S. LaSalle Street, 37th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603
☎ (312) 793-2800
Fax: (312) 793-5257

Marion Office

🏠 2309 W. Main Street, Suite 115
Marion, IL 62959
☎ (618) 993-7090
Fax: (618) 993-7258

