



New York City Comptroller
John C. Liu

NEWS RELEASE

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**LIU LAUNCHES WEBSITE ENABLING CHEATED
WORKERS TO SEARCH FOR MONEY THEY ARE OWED**

\$2 Million Remains Unclaimed From Prevailing Wage Settlements;

Search at www.comptroller.nyc.gov/KnowYourRights

NEW YORK, NY – City Comptroller John C. Liu today launched a website that will enable workers who were paid less than the prevailing wage on City public works projects to search online for the money they are owed. The Comptroller’s office routinely collects funds from settlements with offending contractors. Currently, \$2 million remains unclaimed.

“Contractors working on City projects must pay prevailing wages as required under the law. This website puts power back in the hands of workers and helps to right the wrongs they’ve suffered,” Comptroller Liu said.

The new website features a confidential search tool accessible to the public. Investigations by the Comptroller’s Bureau of Labor Law indicated that some workers didn’t file claims with the Comptroller’s office because of the misapprehension that doing so would subject them to immigration enforcement. According to New York State law, workers employed on public works projects are entitled to prevailing wages regardless of immigration status.

Labor law data shows that immigrant Latino workers are some of the most exploited in terms of substandard wages and a lack of occupational safety. A great many of the underpaid workers for whom money has been collected have been Latinos.

Past practices to locate workers consisted of publishing names in newspapers in hopes that the workers would see their names and contact the Comptroller’s office. The website simplifies the claims process, allowing workers to conveniently search an online, user-friendly database.

Since 2010, the Comptroller’s office has collected some \$12 million in unpaid prevailing wages and benefits for New York workers — a record high. At present, a total of 723 workers have not claimed their unpaid wages – 552 of whom whose last known address was in the five boroughs. Most payouts are for more than \$1,000, with the upper range at \$59,000.

Last Known Address	Average Award	Number of Unclaimed Awards
Bronx	\$2,279.56	149
Brooklyn	\$1,971.96	204
Manhattan	\$1,822.84	46
Queens	\$4,143.97	131
Staten Island	\$1,978.61	22
NYC	\$2,558.29	552

In April, Comptroller Liu collected \$1.2 million for workers who had been cheated out of their pay. To date, more than \$600,000 of that settlement remains unclaimed.

In another recent example, a claimant collected \$20,000 in back wages for work he had performed as a painter at police precincts and fire stations. Although his checks for the work were issued in prevailing wage amounts, the worker had never received his full wages. His employer had forced him to endorse his checks and return them each week, paying him a daily rate of \$100 in cash. He recouped the back wages after the Comptroller’s Bureau of Labor Law helped him file a claim.

Prevailing wage settlements that are not claimed within six years revert to the City’s treasury.

“The Consulate General of Mexico has worked closely with the Comptroller’s office, and will continue to do so in defending the labor rights of migrant workers,” said **Carlos M. Sada, Consul General of Mexico in New York**. “We recognize Comptroller Liu’s commitment toward the most vulnerable of New Yorkers and celebrate the success of our joint mission. We want our community to know that they can count on the Consulate and the Comptroller’s office to report abuse and file complaints without fear, and we will continue to assist the Comptroller in locating those Mexican workers who are eligible for the compensation he has obtained on their behalf.”

“The hard-working men and women who build New York City’s public works projects are literally laying the foundation for our City’s future,” said **NYC Council Member and Civil Service and Labor Committee Chair James Sanders**. “It’s an outrage that they should be paid anything less than the prevailing wage for the work they do on behalf of the future residents of New York. Now these workers can be compensated, offering them the opportunity to conduct a confidential search to learn if they are owed any money. With \$2 million in funding outstanding, it’s clear that many workers were never adequately paid for the work they did. I encourage anyone who was not paid a prevailing wage for work on a public project to take advantage of this opportunity and be made whole again by the City you helped to build.”

“We cannot stand idly by while our vulnerable immigrant communities are exploited and taken advantage of,” said **NYC Council Member and Immigration Committee Chair Daniel Dromm**. “The labor abuses immigrant workers face in our City are simply unacceptable. Those who have been victims of unfair prevailing wage practices must claim what they have rightfully

earned. The establishment of this new website now gives them a safe and useful tool to find out if they are owed any wages and claim those funds.”

“This important website allows those who have contributed to the building and growth of our City to collect wages that rightfully belong to them,” said **NYS Assembly Member and Labor Committee Chair Keith L.T. Wright**. “The website also enables workers to search for unclaimed money anonymously, keeping them from the risk of abuse or discrimination they might face if they publicly sought out the money they’ve earned. The search is easy to do and is a huge step forward in enforcing prevailing wage laws and defending workers rights.”

“Despite such efforts as the landmark Wage Theft Prevention Act, the underpayment of workers remains a societal epidemic on a massive scale, accounting for nearly \$1 billion a year in stolen wages,” said **Jose Peralta, NYS Senator and Member of the NYS Labor Committee**. “Wage theft is especially prevalent among the undocumented, who may fear that reporting these wrongs will subject them to adverse immigration consequences. Comptroller Liu has done an outstanding job taking on offending contractors, and this website is an excellent policy innovation that will ensure that victimized workers actually receive the wages they have earned.”

“All too often, employers take advantage of workers, especially through wage theft,” said **NYS Assembly Member Francisco Moya**. “In the immigrant community, this happens at alarming rates and goes unreported because of fear and a lack of understanding of the process for claiming funds. We must find every way we can to guarantee that all workers, whatever their immigration status, are given the opportunity to receive a fair wage for an honest day’s work. This website will make accessing the funds owed to workers much easier and give workers the opportunity to claim funds they might not even know they were owed. It is the responsibility of elected officials to promote this new database and make sure we are being strong advocates for our constituents.”

About the Bureau of Labor Law

When performing work on public projects pursuant to City contracts, employers must pay their workers prevailing wages and benefits as spelled out by the law. The Comptroller’s Bureau of Labor Law enforces New York State Labor Laws 220 and 230, and NYC Administrative Code 6-109 in New York City.

These laws require private-sector contractors, vendors, and service providers engaged in public works projects and building-service contracts in New York City to pay no less than the prevailing wage to their employees for work covered by the statutes.

The Comptroller’s office encourages any construction or building-service worker who feels he or she has been shortchanged for work performed at a worksite on City-owned property to call the Bureau of Labor Law at (212) 669-4443. All calls are confidential. For more information on the Bureau of Labor Law, visit <http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/bureaus/bl/prev-wage-info.shtm>.

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