



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

P.O. Box 1748, Austin, TX 78767

Telephone 512/854-9400

Telefax 512/854-4206

JOSÉ P. GARZA
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

TRUDY STRASSBURGER
FIRST ASSISTANT

January 25, 2022

Mayor Adler and Honorable Members of Austin City Council:

I write to you regarding Item 53 on the January 27, 2022 Austin City Council Regular Meeting Agenda, a resolution intended to address and prevent wage theft in our community. I am grateful to Council Member Ann Kitchen, and her co-sponsors Council Members Gregorio Casar, Kathie Tovo, Vanessa Fuentes, and Sabino “Pio” Renteria, for their leadership on this issue.

My office considers wage theft to be a matter of public safety. We know that the public safety of a community is intrinsically tied to the economic stability of its residents.¹ Economic instability - including barriers to employment, a debilitating injury or illness, and wage theft - can spiral a family into a period of financial crisis and make us less safe.

For this reason, my office launched an Economic Justice Enforcement Initiative last September which aims to create opportunities for people accused of nonviolent crimes to reenter the workforce and ensure that employers are held accountable when wage theft or unsafe working conditions rise to the level of criminal conduct. Since then, we have launched a pilot program to connect participants in our pre-trial diversion program with job training opportunities, signed an agreement with the Department of Labor to expand our joint enforcement capabilities, and hired a Public Rights Project Fellow who focuses on these issues.

As we have undertaken this initiative, it has become clear to us that there are not sufficient systems in place to support wage theft victims or deter these legal violations from recurring. We need additional partners in this work. I am hopeful that this resolution presents an opportunity for our office to deepen its collaboration with the City and strategize how we can strengthen avenues available for wage theft victims to seek justice.

If our office can be a resource on this matter, please do not hesitate to reach out to Stephanie Gharakhanian (Stephanie.Gharakhanian@traviscountytexas.gov).

Sincerely,

José P. Garza
Travis County District Attorney

¹ See e.g., *Half of Americans Have Family Members Who Have Been Incarcerated*, EQUAL JUST. INITIATIVE (Dec. 11, 2018) (adults whose household incomes were less than \$25,000 per year were over 60% more likely than those with incomes of \$100,000 to have had a family member incarcerated), <https://eji.org/news/half-of-americans-have-family-members-who-have-been-incarcerated/>.