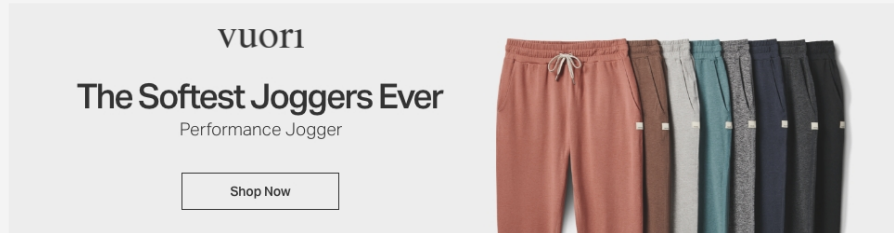


From: The Sacramento Bee - The State Worker Bee news@newsletter.sacbee.com
Subject: Understaffed labor offices threaten California workers
Date: October 16, 2024 at 8:05 AM
To: garrettbrown2021@gmail.com



THE SACRAMENTO BEE



The State Worker Bee

Happy Wednesday! Here's the Oct. 16 edition of The State Worker Bee newsletter.

THIS WEEK'S BUZZ

Impacts of understaffed California labor offices

California has some of the strongest protections for workers in the country, offering paid sick leave and strict guidelines for overtime pay. Most recently, the state [adopted new rules](#) around heat exposure that require employers to provide water, rest, and cool-down areas to employees who work in warm indoor environments.

But the various California departments tasked with enforcing these regulations are understaffed. The lack of enforcement of labor laws are leaving California workers vulnerable to dangerous workplaces and unscrupulous bosses, experts say.

[Labor researchers](#) who have studied the extent to which service sector employers are violating California employment law found the vast majority of serious labor violations are not reported to the state.

"Progressive laws can be nice on paper," said David Weil, a professor at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management.

But, Weil asked, what's the point of those laws if California can't enforce them?

Earlier this year, the California State Auditor dug into the Labor Commissioner's Office, which is responsible for investigating employers when they fail to pay their workers. The audit found that understaffed offices contributed to years-long waits for the state to resolve wage theft complaints and few successful payments to workers.

"We take the findings of this audit very seriously and are fully committed to addressing these challenges," said Labor Commissioner Lilia Garcia-Brower. The labor office pointed to a number of new hires that are intended to beef up the enforcement agency's ranks to better process claims of stolen wages.

The high vacancy rates at the LCO resembles another staffing crisis at a California division: Cal-Cal-OSHA, the state agency responsible for ensuring worker safety.

A [Sacramento Bee investigation](#) published in February found numerous examples

of how the staffing shortage prevented the state from investigating employers for potential criminal negligence. At the Cal-OSHA Bureau of Investigations, staffing shortages were so dire that investigators only had time to look into the most extreme cases: a death on the job.

Over the spring, the staffing crisis worsened. At one point, there was [only a single criminal investigator](#) at the agency's investigative arm.

Earlier this year, Cal-OSHA staff said that severe personnel shortage is just one symptom of a larger culture problem within the Department of Industrial Relations, which also oversees the LCO. Overly burdensome workloads forced Cal-OSHA site inspectors to rush through cases. As a result, staff burn out faster than the department can hire new talent.

In August, Cal-OSHA said it had [filled nine positions](#) in its Bureau of Investigations.

"Having more resources at BOI will help Cal/OSHA in its mission and bring attention to the importance of workplace safety and health," Debra Lee, Cal-OSHA's chief, said in the news release.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

[California contractor fined for heat violations. They are still under investigation for retaliation](#)

[California state workers are staying in their job longer and retiring later. Why?](#)

[California is cutting 10,000 vacant jobs to address budget shortfall. Will it be enough?](#)

[Does proposed tax threaten Tahoe way of life? A controversial measure roils South Lake](#)

WHAT I'M READING

[This California town was already dying. Then the state moved to close its prison](#) — CalMatters

[Teamsters file ethics complaint against Waymo over alleged SFO lobbying](#) — San Francisco Chronicle



William Melhado
State Worker reporter

