

**MAKING THE CASE FOR AN ANTI-WAGE THEFT ORDINANCE -
COMMUNITY ISSUES FORUM ATTENDEES HEAR WHY IT IS NEEDED**

Local wage theft received intense scrutiny at the Community Issues Forum at Christ Church Cathedral on October 29th. A panel led by Brennan Grayson, Executive Director of the Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center, also made the case for a proposed anti-wage theft City Ordinance. Such an ordinance, according to Grayson, would help prevent the all too prevalent practice of cheating workers out of all or part of their wages.

What is wage theft? It can take many forms, explained Grayson, but it basically involves denying employees a portion of or the entire compensation for the work they have completed. Specifically, employers often fail to pay the minimum wage or proper overtime compensation, or they concoct various ways of not paying workers their initially agreed upon wages. Recent immigrants and the working poor are primary victims of this ugly practice, and Grayson noted that among low-wage urban workers, Latinos and African Americans are the most likely to experience wage theft.

Wage theft, acknowledged Grayson, takes place on a daily basis in Cincinnati, and local workers lose millions of dollars in pay every year. One of the primary roles of the Interfaith Workers Center is assisting workers who have been cheated, and two of these workers told their stories to Forum attendees. Salustro and Carlos Perez, a father and son who are recent Latino-immigrants, worked as framers on building projects in Cincinnati. Both were denied their full pay until the Workers Center intervened on their behalf.

Although the Workers Center has been quite successful in helping many workers over the years, Grayson declared that it needed a greater local and public effort to prevent wage theft from taking place. He cited other city governments that have passed laws, and these examples prompted the Center to promote a Cincinnati ordinance. It launched the “Just Pay Cincy Campaign” last May, and it currently works with Vice Mayor David Mann to draft a specific ordinance to put before City Council by the end of the year.

What would an anti-wage theft ordinance do? Although details of a final ordinance are still being worked out, it would essentially impact all entities participating in City economic development and incentive programs. These entities would be responsible for reporting all wage theft complaints and wage theft findings made against anyone they contracted or sub-contracted with. These entities would be subject to specific City imposed financial penalties or fines once wage thefts are determined.

The Center, concluded Grayson, is also building a coalition of religious, civic, and labor groups to support an anti-wage theft ordinance. An event is scheduled for City Hall on Wednesday November 18th. For details, call the Center, 621-5991.