



Good afternoon, Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, and members of the Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for allowing myself and my joint sponsor Representative Erika White to share details about House Bill (HB) 150, legislation concerning the reporting of minor labor law violations and the penalties for violations in the state of Ohio.

HB 150 amends the Revised Code to address the growing exploitation of minors within our state's workforce. This legislation is needed because child labor violations are on the rise and enforcement is lacking. These are serious, and common, transgressions that call for heightened oversight and intervention by the Ohio Department of Commerce. Exploitation of children should never be tolerated, and I take these incidents very seriously.

From 2018-2023, the U.S. Department of Labor has seen a [69 percent increase in children being employed illegally](#) by companies. In FY 2024, they saw [4,030 kids employed in violation of child labor laws](#). According to the CDC, workers aged 15-17 years in the hospitality industry [had the highest percentage of work-related injuries requiring at least 1 day away from work](#).

A 2023 [Times investigation](#) showed that over the past two years, more than 250,000 migrant children have come alone to the United States. Thousands of children have ended up in punishing jobs across the country — working overnight in slaughterhouses, replacing roofs, operating machinery in factories — all in violation of child labor laws. In the past decade, federal prosecutors have brought only about 30 cases involving forced labor of unaccompanied minors.

The violations are happening in Ohio, too. Here are specific instances in recent headlines:

- In February, [2023, despite being warned in September 2021 that the hours worked by 14- and 15-year-old employees at its Slim Chickens' franchise in Streetsboro violated federal law](#), the owner continued the illegal practices for several months at a second location in Avon.
- In April, 2023, an Ohio lathe mill paid an enhanced child labor enforcement penalty of \$22,093 after federal investigators found [the company employed a 15-year-old worker illegally in a hazardous occupation](#) —the operation of a

sawmill – which led the worker to suffer injury when he became entangled in the gears of a powered wood processing machine.

- In May, 2023, [two 10-year-olds were discovered working unpaid and until as late as 2 a.m.](#) at one McDonald’s restaurant in Louisville, Kentucky, operated by Bauer Food LLC.

- The three franchises [operate a total of 62 McDonald’s locations](#) across Kentucky, Indiana, Maryland and Ohio

- In October, 2023, Federal agents found [more than two dozen minors, mainly from Guatemala, illegally working inside a meat processing and sanitation plant](#) run by Gerber’s Poultry in Kidron, Ohio. The immigration advocates working with the Guatemalan community around Kidron say they believe [some of the children have been forced to work by non related adults](#) who have housed them and are taking some or all of their wages.

- In March, 2024, a Brook Park, Ohio painting company was fined \$30,276 in child labor penalties for [employing 17-year-old teens to paint houses and work from roofs in violation of child labor laws.](#)

In 2021, [more than a third \(37%\) of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year. Before the pandemic, mental health was getting worse among high school students. Youth with poor mental health may struggle with [school and grades](#), decision making, and their overall wellbeing. Mental health problems in youth are also often associated with other health and behavioral risks such as increased risk of [drug use](#) and experiencing violence.

Children are not products; they are kids and they are vulnerable. We should be investing in workers, not turning our babies into another cog in the economic wheel. One person’s profits are not more important than the future of this state, or our children. Ohio can and needs to do better.

In February 2023, the U.S. Department of Labor announced the [creation of an Interagency Task Force to Combat Child Labor Exploitation](#) to better align federal efforts to protect children from exploitative situations in the workplace. In fiscal year 2023, their investigators identified [child labor violations in 955 cases and assessed employers with more than \\$8 million in penalties.](#) In fiscal year 2024, there were [736 cases and \\$15 million in penalties.](#)

We need HB 150 because it will do the following:

- Allow the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Wage and House Administration to hire staff to perform audits of businesses that hire minors, ensuring employers were securing proper work permits and parental consent prior to employment.
- Increase fines for violating existing child labor laws to \$50,000 and appropriate \$150,000 to investigate minor labor law violations and complaints.
- Require school employees to report awareness of or reasonable suspicion of a student under 16 years old being employed in a manner that violates Ohio's minor labor laws.

By expanding investigations, increasing penalties, and asking our educators to partner with us in placing the emphasis on learning and being a kid, Ohio will be sending a clear and concise message that children cannot and should never be the answer to our workforce shortage problems. It is paramount that we prioritize and safeguard our most vulnerable populations from being harmed or taken advantage of in the workplace.

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Lear, and members of the Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify. I'm proud to turn it over to my joint sponsor, Representative White.