

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

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Organization (If Applicable): _____

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Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): _____

Specific Issue: _____

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

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How much time will your testimony require? _____

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Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 50 Before the Ohio House Commerce & Labor Committee

Chair Mark Johnson, Vice-Chair Beth Lear, Ranking Member Lauren McNally, and Members of the House Commerce & Labor Committee: My name is Isbel Alvarado, and I serve as Case Manager and Community Organizer at the Central Ohio Worker Center.

I submit this testimony to the committee on behalf of Ohio's network of worker centers, the Northeast Ohio Worker Center, the Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center, and the Central Ohio Worker Center. All three of our organizations work to build a more just Ohio, where all workers, regardless of background, are treated with dignity, paid fairly, and protected under the law. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 50.

- 1. SB 50 weakens protections designed to keep children safe and focused on school**
 - a. Ohio's child labor laws exist to ensure that young workers can gain early job experience without sacrificing their education, health, or safety. Extending work hours into later evening shifts undermines that balance.
 - b. Fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds are still in middle and early high school. Asking them to work until 9 p.m. on school nights, often followed by commutes and homework, means less rest, less study time, and higher risks of burnout.
- 2. Worker Centers in Ohio have documented real cases of wage theft and child labor violations**
 - a. We have directly assisted minors and young workers who have experienced serious wage and hour violations under current law, before any expansion of work hours.
 - b. At the Central Ohio Worker Center we supported a group of workers who filed a complaint alleging wage theft and violations of Ohio's minor labor laws.
 - i. The allegations included:
 1. Minors working long days without proper breaks;
 2. Workers who were not paid the Ohio state minimum wage;
 3. Minors who were not paid for their work entirely or in part.
 - c. These are not isolated incidents. They illustrate how, even under current limits, employers are already violating youth labor protections. Weakening those protections through SB 50 would only make such abuses more likely and harder to detect.
- 3. Low-wage and immigrant teens are especially vulnerable**
 - a. Worker centers serve low-wage and immigrant workers, and we see many teenagers who work to help their families make ends meet. They take jobs to contribute to rent, groceries, and other basic needs.
 - b. When young people are put in that position, they are often reluctant to speak up about mistreatment or unpaid wages because their families depend on that income. This makes them especially easy to exploit, at a time in life when they



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should be focusing on school, rest, and personal development, not bearing the burden of family finances.

- c. SB 50 risks normalizing that exploitation by opening the door to later hours and weaker oversight.
- 4. Extending hours creates enforcement challenges and conflicts with federal law**
 - a. The federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) limits 14- and 15-year-olds to work until 7 p.m. during the school year. SB 50's proposal to allow work until 9 p.m. would create confusion among employers and complicate enforcement.
 - b. Many small businesses are unaware that federal law supersedes state law, and as a result, young workers could be illegally scheduled, and bear the burden of the violation themselves.
- 5. Child labor violations are on the rise, this is the wrong direction**
 - a. Between 2019 and 2024, DOL saw a 31% increase in the number of children employed in violation of federal child labor laws. In February 2023, WHD announced findings from one of the most pivotal child labor exploitation cases in agency history. See [WHD Child Labor Report to Congress 2023-2024](#). Ohio is not immune. These violations are happening in our own communities, often in low-wage sectors like food service, entertainment, and retail.
 - b. At a time when enforcement agencies are stretched thin, SB 50 sends the wrong message: that the state is willing to loosen protections instead of strengthening them.
- 6. True youth opportunity means education, not exploitation**
 - a. We support opportunities for young people to gain job experience, but that goal should be met through structured, educational, and well-supervised programs, like youth apprenticeships, paid internships, and after-school work-study partnerships.
 - b. What SB 50 offers is not opportunity, it's exposure to longer hours, increased fatigue, and greater vulnerability to abuse.
- 7. Conclusion**
 - a. For these reasons, the Northeast Ohio Worker Center, Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center, and Central Ohio Worker Center strongly urges this committee to reject Senate Bill 50.
 - b. Our organizations' experience shows that current safeguards are already being violated, and extending work hours for 14- and 15-year-olds will only make exploitation more common.
 - c. As community organizations, we believe Ohio's priority should be protecting children, promoting fair wages, and ensuring accountability in the workplace, not turning back the clock on child labor safeguards.

Thank you for your attention and for your service to the people of Ohio.

Respectfully submitted,
Northeast Ohio Worker Center
Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center
Central Ohio Worker Center