

2024 Policy & Advocacy Agenda: *Bold Solutions to Advance Racial and Economic Justice*

Founded in 1969, the [National Employment Law Project \(NELP\)](#) is a leading advocacy organization with the mission to build a just and inclusive economy where all workers have expansive rights and thrive in good jobs. Our 2024 Policy and Advocacy Agenda describes how we continue to advance transformative solutions to achieve racial and economic justice and support Black and immigrant workers in building power.

NELP [advances its mission](#) with its partners through transformative legal and policy solutions, research, capacity-building, and strategic communications at the local, state, and federal levels. In the year ahead, we will come together in deep partnership with allies to fight for the issues paramount to working people: workers' rights, safe workplace conditions, just wages and benefits, and equitable employment opportunities.

At a time when workers are uniting around their power to manifest the principles of democracy, equity, and solidarity, we see a path to creating economic security over a lifetime—a good-jobs economy. A good-jobs economy is built on worker power, with which we collectively shape the conditions of the job to ensure our communities rise together. Leveraging our multiple roles as thought leader, connector, and policy expert, in 2024, we will:

1. Raise the Floor for Wages, Benefits, and Job Conditions
2. Build Worker Power and Push Back Corporate Influence
3. Bolster Enforcement of Worker Rights
4. Advance an Inclusive Economy

1

Raise the Floor for Wages, Benefits, and Job Conditions

Since striking fast-food workers launched the Fight for \$15 and a union movement in 2012, [12 states, the District of Columbia, and more than four dozen localities](#) have approved the increase of their minimum wages to \$15 or higher per hour. In 2024, we will be supporting workers' demands in states including Alaska, Missouri, and Oklahoma to increase the minimum wage to \$15. At the federal level, NELP is continuing its [advocacy](#) for the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) to strengthen and expand overtime protections for more workers across the country. The USDOL updated rule promises a significant shift: it stands to benefit over 3.6 million workers. This change expands overtime compensation eligibility, offering much-needed relief to workers struggling to make ends meet or forced to work overtime that takes away from their personal and family lives.

When workers lose a job, unemployment insurance (UI) provides crucial economic security. Unemployment benefits serve as a bridge, supporting workers when they lose a job and providing a meaningful opportunity to search for new employment. Yet [most jobless workers](#) do not receive benefits. Many are discouraged from even applying, and many states impose stringent eligibility criteria that result in exclusions of workers of color, women, older workers, and those with disabilities. With our state and national partners, in 2024, we will call on Congress to support the [Unemployment Insurance Modernization and Recession Readiness Act](#), which would reform the UI system and enable workers to thrive. To support state campaigns, we are adding resources to the [UI Policy Hub](#) and focusing on [UI financing reform](#) campaigns. Also, the upsurge in worker organizing has highlighted the hardship faced by striking workers' families. We will support campaigns expanding access to [UI benefits to striking workers](#), following the lead of New York and New Jersey.

Corporate misclassification of employees as independent contractors is an urgent problem that undermines workers' rights. This practice not only erodes workers' wages and benefits, but also hinders fair competition of law-abiding businesses; it also perpetuates racial and gender occupational segregation, creating a second-tier workforce of predominantly workers of color. In 2024, we will support the finalization and implementation of USDOL's independent contractor rule, which will ensure broad coverage under the Fair Labor Standards Act as Congress intended and is consistent with U.S. Supreme Court precedent.

We are also partnering with ride-hail drivers in Colorado, Minnesota, and Chicago to win robust minimum pay standards, transparency rights, and deactivation protections. In addition, we are defending against corporate attempts to roll back employment rights and protections for app-based workers. In New Jersey and Illinois, we are supporting the strong implementation of the historic ["temp worker bill of rights" laws](#) passed in 2022 and 2023 that will ensure that temporary staffing workers receive the same pay and benefits as permanent employees.

Build Worker Power and Push Back Corporate Influence

When workers can come together to change their working conditions for the better, without fear of retaliation, then systems change is possible. Our focus is on bolstering worker centers, with the goal of advancing and safeguarding the rights of underpaid workers of color and reinforcing collective action. In 2024, we are strengthening the organizational capacity of 50 worker centers focused on Black, immigrant workers in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, and more. One of our focal points will be engaging with at least a dozen worker centers to experiment with multi-entity organizational forms to support direct worksite organizing and build power in worker associations.

Between 20 to 25 percent of workers in every region of the United States are employed in industries that can expose them to climate dangers. Black and Latinx workers have been funneled into jobs where climate hazards are becoming a daily reality. We estimate that nationally, approximately 38.7 million workers are employed in industries that can routinely place them at risk. Yet, the right to refuse dangerous work in the current law is too vague and onerous to protect workers. In 2024, our focus will include championing workers' demands for robust protections from workplace dangers like excessive heat, smoke, and cold. We are advocating for a [right to refuse dangerous work](#) in the face of natural disasters. This includes ensuring job-protected paid leave, anti-retaliation provisions with meaningful penalties for noncompliance, and expansive UI benefits.

Over the last several years, we have [advocated for legislation](#) around the country that would require warehouse employers, such as Amazon, to provide worker-centered training, more transparency about work pace rates, prohibit employers from using quotas that interfere with rest breaks or worker safety, and protect workers from retaliation when they raise concerns and try to assert their rights. Amazon directly employs over a million people in the United States—and its business model is spreading. [Our analysis](#) demonstrates that Amazon's pay is inadequate compared to other warehouse employers. Given Amazon's role as a large-scale employer, particularly of workers of color, achieving these reforms is a crucial step towards advancing racial justice. In 2024, we are supporting campaigns to protect warehouse workers in [Connecticut](#), [Illinois](#), [Massachusetts](#), and New York.

3

Bolster Enforcement of Worker Rights

The violation of wage laws creates severe economic insecurity for those workers who lose their unpaid wages. Wage theft is a pervasive problem in our society, draining billions annually from workers and the economy. Workers need and deserve laws and agency action that not only provide fair compensation to workers, but also deter employers from repeating violations. Immigrant workers of color are at the epicenter of the escalating crisis of workplace abuse. In 2023, we worked with partners to develop a [guide for worker advocates](#) to understand how to use the “deferred action” process to protect undocumented workers involved in labor disputes. Leveraging the [deferred action guide](#), we will engage in 2024 with groups representing thousands of workers facing immigration-related employer retaliation resulting from raising workplace complaints.

In 2024, we will also advocate for substantial investments in strategic community partnerships, enabling effective government oversight and adherence to fundamental workplace standards. For example, in California, we are working in coalition to strengthen the role of worker organizations to educate workers and build their leadership. Over the last seven years, the groundbreaking [California Strategic Enforcement Partnership](#) (CSEP) has demonstrated the effectiveness of government engagement with community organizations that have industry knowledge and trusted relationships with workers. These worker groups support more effective, targeted wage theft cases. Building on our successes, in 2022 we began developing a strategic community engagement model with USDOL and others. After successful pilots around the country improved jobs in inequitable and dangerous industries, we are continuing to engage in 2024 with community-based partners in California, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Washington.

4

Advance an Inclusive Economy

A worker’s race, ethnicity, gender, or arrest and conviction record should not determine their opportunities in the labor market. Yet occupational segregation in the nation’s economy continues to perpetuate structural racism built into a labor market founded on slave labor. Occupational segregation, the systemic overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a demographic group in a particular occupation or field, segments the labor market in discriminatory ways that holds all workers back. In 2024, we are continuing to engage in quantitative and qualitative data research and collection focused on understanding the drivers and impacts of occupational segregation for Black women workers and people with arrest and conviction records, particularly those based in southern states. We will also explore federal policy solutions to drive occupational integration in targeted industries for Black, immigrant, and women workers.

In 2023, NELP completed an evaluation of nearly 20 years of fair chance employment advocacy, which refers to employer policies or practices that expand job opportunities for people with arrest and conviction records. We will continue to build in 2024, amplifying the eight-part “[Fair Chance Hiring for Employers](#)” series and the toolkit for “[Fair Chance Hiring in Financial Services](#)” that comprehensively explores the steps employers can take. Also, in partnership with incarcerated workers, formerly incarcerated people, and advocates, we are committed to demanding genuine opportunities for quality employment across the carceral continuum. Our focus ranges from ensuring robust health and safety protections for incarcerated disaster workers to ending underpaid and dangerous work for those under parole supervision and other forms of court-related surveillance.