# BLACK WORKERS MATTER

# a know your rights guide

By Legal Aid at Work & the Los Angeles Black Worker Center

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for additional information or accessibility options please visit <a href="https://legalaidatwork.org/">https://legalaidatwork.org/</a> or call 415-864-8848

Employment is at-will and you can be fired for any reason or no reason at all, *so long as* that reason is not illegal.

# **A**CAUTION

# **DISCRIMINATION IS AGAINST THE LAW**

# IT IS ILLEGAL FOR YOUR EMPLOYER TO FIRE YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE BLACK!!!

## THE LAW

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act prohibit employment discrimination, harassment, and retaliation based on membership in a protected class – **Race and Color** (like National Origin, Religion, and Sex) are protected classes.

Your employer cannot discriminate against you in things such as **hiring**, **pay**, **benefits**, **promotion**, **training opportunities**, **assignments**, **and firing**.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Racial discrimination is unfavorable treatment against an employee because of their race or a race-related characteristic, such as skin tone, hair texture, or facial features. Racial discrimination can occur between people of the same race or ethnicity.

Workplace racial discrimination can be direct and/or indirect.

**Direct:** intentionally discriminatory conduct such as derogatory comments, racial slurs, jokes, harassment, bullying or threats on account of race.

**Indirect:** discriminatory conduct is more subtle and can include disparaging treatment compared to other coworkers and other inequalities like pay, promotions, or job classification. It can also include the denial of employment benefits like training or flexible work hours when those benefits are extended to other coworkers but not you because of your race.

Title VII does not require that you prove your employer purposefully intended to discriminate against you.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PROVE

You need to show your employer took a negative employment action against you—such as firing you, failing to promote you, denying you an employment benefit or other retaliatory act—on the basis of your race.

Even if an employer has a legitimate reason for taking a negative employment action, if the decision was partially motivated by racial discrimination, the employer has violated the law.



## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

You should *document* all relevant interactions with your employer, *preferably in writing*. Printout or save any relevant emails to your personal email account, not your workplace account.

Record all instances of racist conduct, including:

- 1) the date and approximate time;
- 2) what was said or done and by whom;
- 3) who was present, witnessed, or heard the offending comments or conduct, and
- 4) their response to the comments or conduct.

If there is an **employee handbook**, check to see if there is a complaint process outlining who you should approach, such as human resources.

If the person who you are supposed to report to is the perpetrator of the racist conduct, then you should approach someone in upper management, including the owner.

# Document all interactions, *preferably* in writing.

★ Request your personnel record to be sure it's accurate!

If your employer fails or refuses to correct their racially discriminatory conduct or policies, you

RACISM JOURNAL 7/1/20: Today, my boss said... 7/10/20: Today, my coworker... ACTION TAKEN:

can file a complaint with the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** if your employer has **15 or more employees**, or the **California Civil Rights Department (CCRD)** (formerly the Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH)) if your employer has **5 or more employees**.

You have <u>300 days</u> from the last discriminatory action to file with the EEOC. You <u>have 3 years</u> from the date of the last discriminatory act to file a claim with the DFEH. <u>You still have 1 year to file a lawsuit after</u> receiving a right-to-sue letter from the DFEH. **You do not need an attorney to file a complaint!** 

#### **Websites**

- ★ https://www.eeoc.gov/youth/filing-complaint
- ★ https://www.calcivilrights.ca.gov/



#### SAMPLE EMPLOYMENT RECORDS REQUEST

[Date ]

[Employer Name] [Business Name] [Employer Address]

#### Re: Employment Records Request

Dear [Mr./Ms Employer:]

I was formerly employed with [Business Name] between approximately [Date] and [Date]. The purpose of this letter is to request my employment records. An employer's duty to maintain these records and comply with this request is regulated by the California Labor Code ("Labor Code") and the relevant Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Order ("Wage Order").

#### Time and Pay Records

Labor Code § 226 requires that employers keep the following information on file for each employee for a minimum of three years:

- The employee's dates of employment.
- The employee's hourly rates and the corresponding number of hours worked by the employee at each hourly rate.
- When the employee begins and ends each work period (including meal periods and split shift intervals).
- Total hours worked by the employee.
- All deductions.
- Gross wages earned.
- Net wages earned.

Labor Code § 226 further states that, upon reasonable request, an employer must allow a current or former employee the right to inspect or receive the above information "as soon as practicable, but no later than 21 calendar days from the date of the request." An employer's failure to comply within this timeframe entitles a current or former employee to recover a seven hundred fifty dollar (\$750) penalty from the employer.

#### Personnel Records

In addition to their right to time and pay records, employees, and their representatives, have the right to inspect and receive a copy of their personnel files pursuant to Labor Code § 1198.5. This statute applies to both former and current employees. Section 432 of the Labor Code further specifies that employers must furnish copies of all employment records bearing the employee's signature.

Labor Code § 1198.5 also requires that the file be made available for inspection or receipt within a "reasonable" amount of time, "but not later than 30 calendar days from the date the employer receives a written request." An employer's failure to comply within this timeframe likewise entitles a current or former employee to recover a seven hundred fifty dollar (\$750) penalty from the employer.

#### Compliance with this Request

By this letter, I request that you make available all of my time and pay records and personnel records covering the duration of my employment with your company. Labor Code § 226 and § 1198.5 require you to make copies of both my time and pay records and my personnel records upon my request. Please be aware that it is unlawful to destroy or alter records that may be used in litigation, including but not limited to time and personnel records.

Please send the records described above immediately. The records should be addressed to me and mailed to:

[Your Address]

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

[Your Signature]

# WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT A PAST CRIMINAL RECORD?



01

Identify your situation

Figure Out Your Desired Solution

02

# 03

Depending on your situation and desired solution, there are several petitions you can file with the court.



Drawing by Holly Stuckey This art was originally published in Incarceratedly Yours, issue ii: Don't You Forget About Me

# SEALING YOUR RECORDS

YOUR SITUATION

WHAT TO DO

You were arrested, but no case was filed	PETITION the court to destroy and seal arrest records under <u>Penal Code, §</u> <u>851.8- https://oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/idtheft/forms/bcia-8270.pdf</u>
You completed probation after being convicted of a misdemeanor.	PETITION the court to dismiss the misdemeanor conviction under <u>Penal Code § 1203.4- https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/cr180.pdf</u>
You successfully completed a	PETITION for records to be sealed - including of arrest and detention -
"diversion program" before a case was filed	2 YEARS after completion under <u>Penal Code § 851.87</u>
You successfully completed a	PETITION for records to be sealed - including of arrest and detention -
"drug diversion program"	under <u>Penal Code § 851.90</u>
You are in the Department of Justice's DNA	PETITION for records to be expunged under Penal Code, § 299
and Forensic Identification Database	- <u>https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/cr185.pdf</u>

See Appendix (Fair Chance Resources) for links to Petition Forms

It can be difficult to find a job after spending time in the criminal system.



California's Fair Chance Act, enacted in 2018, is meant to help make the employment process fairer for those with past convictions.



# • FF LIMITS INF • :

#### EMPLOYERS CANNOT CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING INFO. FOR EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS:

• arrests that did not result in convictions

CHANCE

- pre- or post-trial diversion programs (e.g. drug rehab)
- judicially dismissed convictions (a.k.a. "expunged")
- judicially sealed convictions
- pardons

CA

FAIR

ACT

- certificates of rehabilitation
- juvenile court history

# BAN! THE! BOX!

# EMPLOYERS ARE NOT ALLOWED:



TO ASK YOU ABOUT CONVICTIONS ON JOB APPLICATIONS OR IN INTERVIEWS.

> TO RUN BACKGROUND CHECKS BEFORE THEY OFFER YOU A JOB.

# FAIR CHANCE PROCESS

Once you have a conditional job offer, employers are allowed to run background checks. So what happens next? The Fair Chance Process.

1. Employers have to tell you, through a notice in writing, if they will be taking any actions against you (i.e., cancelling a job offer, firing you, or suspending you) based on your conviction history.



2. The notice must include a copy of the background check report, and they have to give you at least 5 business days to reply.

WRITE THEM BACK



Copy of background check



Written Notice 2

Explanation



\* Note: there are certain exemptions where the FCA does not apply, such as criminal justice agencies or other employers that are required to conduct background checks by law.

# CRIMINAL RECORDS RESOURCES

# REPORT VIOLATIONS

### CALIFORNIA CIVIL RIGHTS DEPARTMENT (CCRD)

Violations of Fair Chance/Discrimination Laws 1 (800) 884-1684 <u>https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/</u>

U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (EEOC) Violations of Discrimination Laws 1 (800) 669-4000 <u>https://www.eeoc.gov/</u>

CA LABOR COMMISSIONER Violations of Equal Pay Act, Wage Laws (650) 326-6444 <u>https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/HowToFileRetaliationComplaint.htm</u>

# GET LEGAL HELP

LEGAL AID AT WORK (415) 864-8848 https://www.legalaidatwork.org

RIGHTS OF JOB SEEKERS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS https://legalaidatwork.org/factsheet /criminal-records/

Art by Joseph Krauter This art was originally published in Incarceratedly Yours, issue II



Black workers are more likely to be falsely accused of theft or misconduct on the job.

# Don't let that sh\*t go!



# File a Wrongful Termination Claim

Wrongful termination claims can be filed alongside discrimination or retaliation claims with:

- CCRD (https://www.calcivilrights.ca.gov/) or
- EEOC (https://www.eeoc.gov/filing-charge-discrimination)

# **Address Retaliation**

If you believe that you were actually fired because you complained about discrimination or engaged in other legal protected activities (in other words, the accusation of misconduct was just an excuse to fire you), you may have a retaliation claim, which can be filed with CCRD or EEOC (for discrimination) or with DLSE (if you complaine d a bout pay or wages).

# **Challenge Misconduct for UI**

If you are denied Unemployment Insurance because your employer falsely accuses you of misconduct, you have the right to appeal EDD's decision! File an appeal and get in touch with Legal Aid at Work if a hearing is scheduled.

# **Prevent Bad References**

It is illegal for a former employer to make false statements about you to a potential future employer. If an employer lies about you when giving a job reference, then you may be able to sue for libel or slander (depending on whether the statement was written or spoken). See legalaidatwork.org for a form letter you can use to remind your former employer of your rights.

# **Contest False Imprisonment**

An employer can confine employees while conducting a "reasonable investigation" of suspected theft. However, unreasonable confinement, even for as short as 15 minutes, is grounds for a false imprisonment lawsuit against your employer.

Jamaal Barber, "To Be Free"



# Disability may result from injustices experienced at any point in life.

Disability is not always something you are born with or develop as you age. Disability can also **emerge** as a result of the racist structures and inequality in our society that disproportionately affect Black communities.

Police violence, military trauma, unsafe working conditions, housing deprivation, environmental hazards, and inaccessibility to fresh foods are just a few examples of systemic racism which can lead to lasting physical and psychological **trauma**. This trauma can eventually lead to **disabilities** such as PTSD, diabetes, anxiety, heart disease, and cancer.





YOU HAVE RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS AT WORK

Persons with disabilities of all kinds have rights and protections at the workplace. The next page offers some basics on how to take the next steps to assert your legal rights.

WE WELCOME YOUR CALL TO THE DISABILITY RIGHTS HELPLINE (877-350-5441)



AND EQUALITY

Need accommodations? Facing discrimination?

#### **HOW THIS MIGHT WORK**

Alex needs 12 weeks off for treatment for his disability. His doctor then extends his leave by 3 weeks.

job-protected leave

extended leave as an accommodation

**Request from** 

your employer

org)

(See sample letters at

www.legalaidatwork.

Go to eeoc.gov or

dfeh.ca.gov



Changes to the way you do

your job (such as working part-

time, telecommuting, or using

Protection from discrimination.

harassment. and retaliation

specialized equipment) or transfer

wage replacement

QUESTIONS (2) Call 877-350-5441 legalaidatwork.org



Legal Aid at Work cannot ensure this information is current or be responsible for any use to which it is put. Created with support from the Mount Zion Health Fund & the Skadden Foundation.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

FAIR EMPLOYMENT & HOUSING ACT

· 1+ employee for harassment

· 15+ EMPLOYEES

· 5+ employees;

disability@legalaidatwork.org

# PARENTING AT WORK

Alicia works in California and just found out she's pregnant with her third child. She is a grocery store cashier at a national chain.

**PREGNANCY ACCOMMODATION.** Alicia knows it's illegal for her employer to discriminate against or harass her for her pregnancy but she's worried about having to stand for long periods of time. Because her employer has **5 or more employees**, she has the right to a **reasonable accommodation** for her pregnancy. She follows the company's usual procedure and asks for rest breaks and a place to sit, then follows up with an email



to confirm the conversation. Her employer asks for a **letter from her healthcare provider**, so Alicia provides one. She also has the right to **job-protected time off** for prenatal care, morning sickness, and other pregnancy-related conditions and **3 paid sick days a year** under CA law.



LEAVE. Because Alicia's employer has five or more employees, she can take time off for pregnancy and childbirth. She gives her employer a **certification** from her healthcare provider before her leave to make sure her job is safe. She can take 4 weeks of pregnancy disability leave before her due date, and 6 weeks after her due date. If she has a C-section, she can take 8 weeks off after she delivers. If she experiences complications before or after she has her baby and needs more time, she can take up to four months of pregnancy disability leave total. She knows her employer can't **retaliate** against her for taking this leave and her job is protected, but she's worried about how she's going to get paid for that time. Because she pays into California State Disability Insurance, she can get a percentage of her weekly wages paid by EDD if she applies at EDD.ca.gov.

**CONTINUED LEAVE.** 6 weeks after her baby is born, Alicia isn't ready to go back to work. If she has worked for her employer for at least a year, performed 1250+ hours of work in the previous year, and if her employer has at least 5 employees, she qualifies for 12 weeks of job-protected baby bonding leave. She can take this leave anytime within one year of the baby's birth. Baby bonding leave can be used by any parent who needs to take leave to care for a newborn, adopted, or foster child, so her baby's father, Joseph, decides to take leave because he meets the requirements too. They apply at EDD.ca.gov and receive 60 or 70% of their weekly wages for 8 weeks. Joseph has been working in San Francisco for the past 180 days, and his company has more than 20 employees, so his employer is required to pay him the remaining 40% of his wages for 8 weeks, up to a cap, under the San Francisco Paid Parental Leave Ordinance.



LACTATION ACCOMMODATION. When Alicia returns to work, she realizes she needs an accommodation for lactation. Alicia's supervisor tells her she can use the bathroom, but Alicia knows that under the law, she has the right to a space that is not a bathroom and is (1) safe, clean and private, (2) has a surface to place a breast pump, (3) has a place to sit, and (4) has electricity with a refrigerator and sink nearby. She informs her employer about this law, and they find an appropriate space for her.

Alicia also knows that she can call Legal Aid at Work's Work & Family Helpline if she wants to learn more about her rights or get legal advice to help her assert her rights at work.

The phone number is **800-880-8047** toll-free in California, or she can go to the website at **www.legalaidatwork.org/wf** to learn more.





# FAIR EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING ACT (FEHA)

- Illegal for your boss to fire, fail to hire, or discriminate against you based on your race or for being trans.
- Prohibits harassment by boss, co-workers, or customers.

File a complaint at: https://www.calcivilrights.ca.gov/complaintprocess/

# CIVIL RIGHTS ACT (TITLE VII)

- Illegal for your boss to harass or discriminate against you based on your gender identity or race.
- Applies to your workplace conditions including your pay and benefits.



File a complaint at: https://www.eeoc.gov/filing-charge-discrimination



# **YUP, THAT'S HARASSMENT**

## Bathroom accessibility

- You have the right to use the restroom that corresponds with your gender identity. **Incorrect pronoun usage**
- You have the right to be addressed by the name and pronoun that corresponds to your gender identity.
- Your employee documents should be changed accordingly.

#### Dress codes

• If an employer enforces a reasonable workplace appearance standard, the dress code must be enforced in a way that judges your compliance based on standards appropriate for your gender identity.

#### Teasing or degrading comments

• Persistent teasing or degrading comments can be harassment.



#### Not being paid a minimum wage.

HOURLY RATE OF PAY VARIES ACROSS CA.

FOR THE MOST UP TO DATE MINIMUM WAGE IN YOU CITY, SEARCH "MINIMUM WAGE [CITY]"

What does wage theft look like?

## Not being paid Over Time or Double Time.

OVER TIME: 1.5X HOURLY WAGE AFTER 8 HOURS\* DOUBLE TIME: 2X HOURLY WAGE AFTER 12 HOURS\* \*CHECK FOR EXCLUSIONS

### Not being given Meal & Rest Breaks.

MEAL BREAK: 30 MIN UNPAID, UNINTERRUPTED REST BREAK: 10 MIN PAID, EVERY 4 HOURS



Wage Theft impacts Black workers, who are more likely to have their wages stolen than white workers.

Black workers experience minimum wage violations at a rate **three times** that experienced by white workers.

Black Workers are particularly vulnerable to this problem because many of work in low-wage or under-regulated industries such as janitorial and building services, as security officers, as warehouse workers, in home health and childcare, and in restaurants.

# YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE!

#### Under the National Labor Relations Act, you have the right to:

- Form, join, or assist a union.
- Bargain collectively with co-workers to set wages, benefits, hours, and working conditions.
- Take action with co-workers to improve working conditions by raising work-related complaints direction with your employer or with a government agency, and seeking help from a union.

#### You can also...

• File a claim with the CA Labor Standards Enforcement: https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/HowToFileWageClaim.htm Los Angeles Black Worker Center 5350 Crenshaw Blvd Los Angeles, CA 90043 (323) 752-7287

Bay Area Black Worker Center 9006 MacArthur Blvd Oakland, CA 94605 (510) 330-5600

# WHEN PEOPLE THINK OF THEFT...

...they think of an individual taking something valuable -- a phone, a car, a piece of clothing -from a store or a home.

But there's another kind of theft that's not talked about as much, but that has a much bigger impact on most Americans: **Wage Theft.** 

Corporations steal billions of dollars in wages from workers each year.



# I'm a gig worker. What are my rights?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Black workers are more likely to work in the "gig economy" than any other groups.<sup>1</sup> Gig workers are often *misclassified* as **independent contractors**, when they are actually **employees**. This lets your boss avoid paying payroll taxes and leaves you without benefits or overtime pay.



Most workers in California are covered by the "ABC Test."2



<sup>1</sup> https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/electronically-mediated-work-new-questions-in-the-contingent-worker-supplement.htm.
<sup>2</sup> Some professions and industries use a different test for determining independent contractor status. Some common jobs that are not covered by the ABC test: doctor, direct salesperson, real estate agent, insurance agent, commercial fisherman, marketer, HR administrator, artist, freelance writer, esthetician, electrologist, manicurist, barber, cosmetologist, and subcontractor. But even if you don't fall under the ABC test, your employer generally still needs to prove that they do not control the way you accomplish your tasks at work. In other words, they can control what task they want you to do, but not how you get it done.

# APPLYING FOR NEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI)

# **Eligibility**

Must have sufficient W-2 earnings in the last 18 months (go to UI Benefit Calculator, EDD.ca.gov) Legal residency and work authorization at time of filing 🔨 Losing your job wasn't your fault V Unemployed or Underemployed

# Application

Online: EDD.ca.gov Phone: 8am - 12pm • English: 1(800) 300-5616 • Español: 1(800) 326-8937 Fax: 1(866) 215-9159 Mail: EDD P.O. Box 12906 Oakland, California 94604

# Certification

- Re-certify benefits every 2 weeks through UI Online (EDD.ca.gov) portal
- Confirm that you are unemployed or underemployed
- Are not earning more than 1.33x weekly benefit amount.

Must be able, available, and actively seeking work

#### Even if you are not eligible for UI, you may be eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA):

- The application for PUA is the same as UI, apply through EDD.CA.GOV
- · PUA is for business owners, self-employed, or independent contractors; or
- · Individuals with limited work history

#### If you are having issues accessing unemployment...

- For gig workers or those who work for an app-based company like Uber or Lyft:
  - See Page 15, "Gig Workers"
- For those who were deemed ineligible for benefits because they were wrongly terminated: • See Page 8, "What to do if Falsely Accused"
- For those struggling to find a job because of conviction history:
  - See Page 5-7, "Fair Chance Act & Ban the Box"
- For those whose employer incorrectly reported their wages:
  - Request a Wage Audit:
  - https://edd.ca.gov/Payroll\_Taxes/How\_to\_Correct\_Prior\_Reports\_or\_Deposits.htm

#### **Additional Questions or Concerns?**

Make an appointment with Legal Aid at Work's Helpline Clinic: PHONE-IN clinic is by appointment only.

You must call (415) 404-9093 to schedule

an appointment.



'The Labor Movement and the Civil Rights Movement ... you cannot separate the two of them'



#### Hattie Canty, labor organizer and strike leader.

# **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

#### · Apply for Workers' Compensation if you suffered from an work-related injury, illness, or disability:

- The injury can be either instantaneous (an accident) OR cumulative (ex: carpal tunnel)
- However, the injury must occur during AND because of your employment.
- Injured workers may be entitled to five main benefits through workers' compensation:
  - reasonable and necessary medical expenses
  - temporary disability benefits
  - permanent disability benefits
  - death benefits
  - supplemental job displacement voucher
- Your employer must complete the "Employer" section and submit it along with your claim.
- Submit your claim: https://www.dir.ca.gov/dwc/fileaclaim.htm

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