

# Democratic lawmakers demand stronger minimum wage enforcement by Pam Bondi



Michael Auslen, Times Staff Writer

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The odds are slim that Democratic lawmakers' push for a higher minimum wage in Florida will be successful this legislative session — they haven't been in the past.

But two members of the minority party said on Wednesday that Attorney General **Pam Bondi** ought to do more to ensure minimum wage earners at least earn as much as they've been promised.

"The attorney general's office is simply not enforcing the minimum wage in the way that other states do," said Rep. **Jose Javier Rodriguez**, D-Miami. "We essentially have it in the constitution, we have it on the books, but as far as enforcement, that's it."

The problem arises when employers pay people for few hours than they actually worked or pay out a daily or weekly salary that equates to less than the minimum wage. That can be a huge deal for a family with low earnings, said Rodriguez and Sen. **Dwight Bullard**, D-Cutler Bay.

Bondi says her office fights to ensure people do get paid a fair wage, although it's rarely through litigation. Often, they fix the problem by reaching out to employers and ensuring they pay what they're supposed to.

"My office has already explained Florida's Minimum Wage Act to the representative and we again suggest that he read the Florida Statute that clearly lays out the process for any person aggrieved by a violation of the law," she said in a written statement. "The representative has not brought one claim to our attention. In every instance where a claim has been submitted to my office, we have addressed it in accordance with the statute and we will continue to do so for any future claims."

Florida's minimum wage is higher than the national minimum. Right now, it's \$8.05 per hour. A full-time minimum wage earner brings in \$16,744 per year, which would put a family of three below the federal poverty line.

Often, people don't know that there are ways to force their employers to pay up: a hotline in the attorney general's office at 866-9NO-SCAM. Still, when people do call Bondi's office for assistance, Rodriguez said it's rare that the state will sue on workers' behalf.

"(What employers are doing) is akin to wage theft when I think about people who are missing out on potentially thousands of dollars," Bullard said.

Rodriguez points to other states that more aggressively go after employers that shortchange their workers and suggested that other, politically motivated lawsuits being pursued by Bondi — for example on issues of immigration and same-sex marriage — should be dropped in favor of more wage enforcement.

This fall, the state will announce next year's minimum wage, which in Florida is tied to inflation, although early indicators suggest it won't increase.

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