

LABOR ESTABLISHES WAGE THEFT INQUIRY

The Senate has agreed to Labor's proposal for an inquiry into wage and superannuation theft.

This inquiry is a win for Australian workers. It will help the Parliament develop ways to stop employers ripping off their staff, and ensure workers get what they are owed.

I congratulate Labor Senators Don Farrell, Tony Sheldon, Deb O'Neill, Anne Urquhart and Raff Ciccone for co-sponsoring the motion to get this inquiry up and running.

For half a decade now Labor has been calling on the Liberals to do something about worker underpayment, whether it occurs as a result of genuine payroll error or deliberate, systematic wage theft.

But despite scandal after scandal – from 7/11 in 2014 to Woolworths just a few weeks ago – the Government has refused to act.

Scott Morrison simply does not take wage compliance seriously. And by failing to act on this issue, his Government has sent the message to businesses that they don't need to take it seriously either.

Wage theft doesn't just hurt those workers who are underpaid. It also has an impact on our economy, as people put off spending and struggle with stagnating wages.

The Senate Economics References Committee inquiry will examine: how best to identify and uncover wage and super theft; how to protect those who expose underpayments; investigating the most effective means of recovering unpaid entitlements, the tax treatment of recovered entitlements, and changes to the existing legal framework that would assist with recovery and deterrence.

The inquiry will also look into whether Government procurement practices can be modified to ensure that public contracts are not awarded to businesses engaged in wage and superannuation theft.

Labor wants a system in which wage theft is properly deterred, and if it happens it's uncovered quickly and workers are repaid swiftly.

This inquiry will help us achieve that aim – but only if the Government starts taking this issue seriously.

If the Government cared about wage theft they would ditch their union-bashing Ensuring Integrity legislation – which will weaken the very institutions dedicated to uncovering wage theft.

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