



SEIU EDUCATION & SUPPORT FUND

MEMORANDUM

June 30, 2025

To: Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
From: SEIU Education and Support Fund
RE: Santa Clara County Fast Food Worker Training Program

The development of a county-wide fast food worker Know Your Rights training program is a critical step toward improving working conditions and quality of life for over 26,000 fast food workers across Santa Clara County. Ensuring that fast food workers are informed about their rights, in a language and manner they understand, and have the tools needed to exercise those rights, will help prevent workplace abuses and create a pathway for workers to use their voices to address problems in their industry. The following brief provides recommended best practices for the structure and core elements of an effective training curriculum, and key considerations for implementation.

FAST FOOD WORKERS KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

Annual training sessions

To support workers' ongoing learning, and strengthen connections with trusted organizations who advocate for workers' rights, trainings should be held on an annual basis. Annual training sessions will also help keep workers informed about changing laws and regulations and provide them with access to current resources. Workers need one paid day off from regular duties each year to attend the training.

In-person training

Worker training is most effective when it takes place [in-person](#). Face-to-face instruction methods support more engaged, relevant and equitable learning than alternative approaches.

Trusted trainers

Training should be administered by qualified, independent, third-party organizations experienced in providing effective training to diverse groups of low-income workers, including immigrants. Training should be held outside of work, in an environment of trust where workers feel safe.

Full-day training

Approximately 8 hours is needed for each training session to cover the basic curriculum in all core areas.

Immigrant workers' rights

Fast food workers who [worry about immigration](#) status and immigration related threats are often deterred from speaking up about workplace problems, putting them at increased risk of abuse in this high-violation industry. In addition to a general overview of immigrant workers' rights, each segment of the training curriculum should include relevant information about the specific rights and protections available to workers regardless of immigration status.

Protections against retaliation

Workers who exercise their rights at work or speak up about workplace problems often face [firings, cuts to hours](#) and other forms of illegal employer retaliation. Retaliation is a major source of [fear](#) among workers, often deterring them from reporting workplace violations or exercising their rights on the job. Workers often lack knowledge of the mechanisms that exist to protect them from retaliation. Training segments should cover all specific anti-retaliation provisions protecting workers who exercise their rights in the relevant core areas.

Iteration and improvement

The training program should develop over time and allow for adjustments to curriculum and program structure to reflect changing laws and regulations; and improvements based on evaluation of program data.

See Appendices [1.1](#), [1.3](#), [1.4](#), [1.5](#), [1.6](#); [2.3](#).

CORE AREAS FOR TRAINING CURRICULUM

1. Overview: Your Rights at Work

88% of California fast food workers [do not know](#) their basic rights at work, according to a 2024 survey. To begin to address this knowledge gap, foundational curriculum should include:

- Introduction to the relevant federal, state and local labor laws, and the regulatory framework for California's fast food industry.
- Overview of basic rights including minimum wage and paid sick days; anti-retaliation rights; and local protections such as San Jose's Opportunity to Work law.
- Workers learn how to participate in the statewide Fast Food Council and receive information about upcoming meetings.

See Appendix [1.3](#)

2. Immigrant workers' rights

[Heightened fear](#) of immigration enforcement and immigration related threats from employers put workers at greater risk of workplace hazards and abuses, deter them from exercising their rights and hinder their access to essential benefits and programs. To provide fast food workers with the knowledge they need to confront these growing concerns, training should include:

- General overview of the rights and protections that apply to all California workers, regardless of immigration status.
- Issue-specific training on immigrant workers' rights integrated into curriculum for all relevant training segments.

See Appendix [1.1](#)

3. Wage Theft

85% of California fast food workers surveyed experienced at least one form of [wage theft](#), a 2022 study found. Fast food workers commonly face minimum wage and [overtime](#) violations, [paid sick leave violations](#), [unpaid work](#), and [meal and rest break violations](#). The following elements will equip fast food workers with the practical knowledge and tools they need to recognize violations and pursue justice when they are victims of wage theft.

- Participants learn about multiple forms of wage theft common in fast food, and work through real-life scenarios to identify violations. Examples may include: denied payment of paid sick days; not paying minimum wage; off-the-clock work; overtime avoidance schemes.
- Training on how to file Wage Claims with DIR.

See Appendices [1.7](#), [1.8](#), [1.9](#); [2.1](#)

4. Health & Safety

Santa Clara County fast food workers frequently face health and safety hazards on the job including [excessive heat](#), [workplace violence](#), [toxic exposures](#) and problems related to [injuries](#) and [communicable illnesses](#). This training segment will inform workers about workplace health and safety laws and protections, and empower them to take action to address hazards and violations.

- Workers learn how to prevent, identify and respond to common hazards in fast food workplaces.
- Training on strategies for reporting health and safety problems, such as calling CalOSHA and filing written complaints.

- Participants learn how to access Workers Comp for workplace injuries and mental health treatment for workplace violence trauma.

See Appendices [1.10](#), [1.11](#), [1.12](#), [1.13](#); [2.2](#)

5. Harassment and Discrimination Including Pregnancy and Parenting

California fast food workers experience many forms of harassment and discrimination on the job. Sexual harassment is [widespread](#) across the industry, including in [Santa Clara County](#). Most fast food workers lack awareness of their rights related to [pregnancy and parenting](#). Workers often face poverty and economic instability during pregnancy and early parenthood, are [prevented from exercising rights](#) to take leave for reproductive health reasons or [leave work to get medical care](#), are denied necessary accommodations, and face retaliation due to pregnancy and parenting-related issues. Workplace discrimination and harassment related to race, gender, disability and age are also common in fast food. Training should include a curriculum that informs fast food workers about their rights and protections related to harassment and discrimination and helps them build the skills needed to address these issues.

- Participants learn about workplace harassment and discrimination, including:
 - Pregnancy and parenting-related rights including freedom from pregnancy-related discrimination and retaliation; accommodations during pregnancy; job-protected, paid leave related to pregnancy and parenting; and the right to a clean, private space to pump breast milk.
 - Common forms of discrimination experienced by fast food workers, including discrimination related to age, race, gender and disability.
 - Sexual harassment. (Note: sexual harassment is common in fast food and will be covered in this module, but this is intended to be a supplement to existing state-mandated training on this issue).
 - Training on how to request needed accommodations and enforce protections against harassment and discrimination, such as the California Civil Rights Department process.

See Appendices: [1.2](#), [1.3](#); [2.4](#)

6. Benefits and Programs

California fast food workers often lack access to important benefits and programs that they or their families may be entitled to. Though California employers are required by law to provide workers with information about many of these programs, fast food workers often [report](#) that they are unaware of them or don't know how to access them.

- Participants learn about essential benefits and programs for which they may be eligible, and how to access them. These include:
 - Paid leave and job-protected leave programs including Disability Insurance; CA Paid Family Leave, California Family Rights Act (CFRA), Workers Comp, state and local paid sick leave
 - Medi-Cal: California's Medicaid health care program, which provides low-cost health coverage for California residents with limited income and resources.
 - CalSavers: California's retirement savings program for workers who do not have a way to save for retirement at work.
- This segment will also address common questions about the benefits and programs available to all workers regardless of immigration status.

See Appendix [1.3](#)

7. Additional Resources

While a full day of Know Your Rights training will provide a strong foundation, workers should come away from the training with additional resources to ensure they have the tools and support they need to address issues as they arise. Examples of such resources include:

- **Santa Clara County Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) Advice Line:** The OLSE provides a free [advice line](#) for Santa Clara County workers seeking information or assistance with labor standards compliance or workplace issues. The County's non-profit partner, Step Forward Foundation, staffs the advice line.
- **Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA):** CHIRLA offers resources to support immigrant workers in exercising their rights to prevent and address labor issues. CHIRLA offers [materials](#) online in Spanish and English including guides on wage theft, discrimination, social security, and workplace immigration enforcement. CHIRLA also provides workers with assistance on wage theft and other employment related issues through their [Empleo hotline](#).
- **Legal Aid at Work:** Through clinics and helplines, [Legal Aid at Work](#) provides free direct legal support for workers across California; as well as Know Your Rights trainings, fact sheets, instructional videos and additional resources both in person and online.
- **Housing and Homelessness Assistance:** Santa Clara County's [Office of Supportive Housing](#) provides assistance to people in need of temporary and emergency housing. Additionally, through the [Homelessness Prevention System](#), the county facilitates temporary financial assistance, legal support, case management and related services to people at risk of losing their housing.