

Strengthen Child Labor Protections

Problem: Rampant, abusive child labor was commonplace in the USA until the 1930's. Since then, state and federal law have served the important role of ensuring youth can be employed in a way that does not harm their health or education. Unfortunately, child labor violations have increased dramatically in the last decade. In Virginia FOIA data on child labor violations showed that child labor cases almost tripled from 2021-2022. Young workers have much higher rates of non-fatal injuries on the job than adults and the highest rates of injuries that require emergency department attention. Too often young workers get hired to fill jobs that are dangerous and detrimental to their health and wellbeing. In addition, new industries and technologies create new forms of jobs that are unhealthy and unsafe for young workers.

Policy solutions: Many mechanisms are needed to ensure young people are empowered and protected in the workplace. Virginia's child labor laws are woefully low, and many have not been updated in decades. In 2024, Virginia responded swiftly to tackle this issue by increasing the fines for child labor violations. While this is a step in the right direction more needs to be done to protect working youth. Virginia must continue to support policy solutions that ensure accountability for child labor violations and uphold the dignity of all young people in the workplace and beyond. HB ### will update the list of prohibited in Virginia's child labor laws to ensure proper safeguards are in place to protect working youth.

Who benefits: Youth – For many young people, employment is necessary to provide for themselves, their families, and their future. Current

law allows those as young as 14 to work in a broad range of jobs like retail, hospitality, and more. There are, however, important limitations on dangerous work and excessive working hours that seek to balance allowing youth to be employed while continuing to work on their studies, hobbies, and social development. Protecting and strengthening current child labor laws will ensure all youth can have the benefits of employment without sacrificing their safety and development.

Economy – A healthy economy is supported by a healthy and educated incoming workforce. By ensuring that youth are employed in ways that increase their educational attainment, Virginia is guaranteed to remain a top state for business.

Businesses – Undermining youth health in employment also undermines businesses. When a business is using unfair labor practices to increase their bottom line, it is hard for other businesses to compete. Commonsense changes to Virginia law will allow more youth to be safely employed while ensuring the future of Virginia's educated workforce.

Our youth are our future!

Everyone benefits from strengthening child labor protections. A well-educated and well-adjusted future workforce is the foundation for innovation. By strengthening current child labor protections, Virginia can safeguard its position as a top state for business and education.

Sources: CDC, Economic Policy Institute, National Employment Law Project, UCLA Institute for Research and Employment, Center for Urban Economic Development, US DOL, VPM.