

Washington Wage Theft Data Report

Data Summary

Through a public records request under the Washington Public Records Act, CBS News sought more than 10 years of data from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries's wage and hour complaint process. In response, the agency provided approximately 6,365 records going back to June 2015.

Overall amounts

The data obtained by CBS News shows that, since 2015, 6,365 wage theft claims were filed with the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries. The total amount owed was \$13,663,941.42.

The median amount for each case was \$723.00. Here's how losing that amount could impact an average worker in Washington

\$723.00 is the equivalent of:

- About 2/5 week(s) of income for the median household in Washington.
- About 1/2 month(s) of rent for a renter paying the fair market rent in Washington or about 3/10 month(s) of mortgage payments for the average homeowner in Washington.
- About 3 week(s) of groceries for a family in Washington.

Some cases were worth even more money, however. Below is a breakdown of the number of cases filed in each amount range:

- \$0-\$100: 630 cases (9.9% of all cases)
- \$100-\$500: 1,864 cases (29.3% of all cases)
- \$500-\$1,000: 1,334 cases (21.0% of all cases)
- \$1,000-\$2,000: 1,169 cases (18.4% of all cases)
- \$2,000-\$5,000: 872 cases (13.7% of all cases)

- \$5,000-\$10,000: 283 cases (4.4% of all cases)
- \$10,000+: 213 cases (3.3% of all cases)

Amounts paid to claimants

Washington did not provide data on the amount paid to claimants.

Time taken to resolve cases

Just because a person won their case doesn't mean they got paid right away. The median amount of time it took to resolve a case in Washington was about 43 days.

Some cases took much longer to resolve. Below is a breakdown of the number of cases resolved in each time period:

- 0-30 days days: 2,201 cases (34.6% of all cases)
- 30-60 days days: 2,136 cases (33.6% of all cases)
- 60-90 days days: 1,119 cases (17.6% of all cases)
- 90-180 days days: 692 cases (10.9% of all cases)
- 180-360 days days: 189 cases (3.0% of all cases)
- 360-720 days days: 22 cases (0.3% of all cases)
- 720+ days days: 2 cases (0.0% of all cases)

How to reference this data

All references to this data must be attributed to CBS News analysis.

On first reference

On first reference, attribution must mention that the data was analyzed by CBS News and was obtained from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries by CBS News through a public records request under the Washington Public Records Act.

On subsequent references

After the first reference, you can simply attribute the data to CBS News analysis, e.g. “CBS News’ analysis” or “the analysis.”

FAQs

What is “wage theft?”

Wage theft refers to the illegal practice of an employer not paying their employees the full amount of wages that they are owed. This can take many forms, such as not paying overtime, not paying the minimum wage, or making illegal deductions from an employee’s pay.

How did you get this data?

CBS News requested the data through a public records request under the Washington Public Records Act. The agency provided data exported from its case management system. The data was then merged with nearly identical data from dozens of other states and analyzed by CBS News.

How can I trust this data?

This data was thoroughly vetted prior to being analyzed. The data was provided by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, which is the agency responsible for enforcing the state’s wage and hour laws. CBS News then undertook a thorough review of the data to ensure that it was accurate and complete. Wherever possible, any errors or inconsistencies were identified and addressed, and cases that were clearly incomplete, inaccurate, or otherwise not relevant were removed from the dataset.

How does my state compare to others?

It is difficult to make direct comparisons between states because each state has different laws and enforcement mechanisms, and because the quality of states’ case management systems can vary wildly. For example, some states track detailed data on each case, including status dates and detailed disposition data, while others only track the amount claimed and the date the case was filed. This means that data on wages and labor conditions in one state may not be directly comparable to data from another state.