

California Wage Theft Data Report

Data Summary

Through a public records request under the California Public Records Act, CBS News sought more than 10 years of data from the California Department of Industrial Relations's wage and hour complaint process. In response, the agency provided approximately 63,442 records going back to January 2017.

Overall amounts

The data obtained by CBS News shows that, since 2017, 63,442 wage theft claims were filed with the California Department of Industrial Relations. The total amount owed was \$558,617,653.64.

The median amount for each case was \$2,070.01. Here's how losing that amount could impact an average worker in California

\$2,070.01 is the equivalent of:

- About 1 week(s) of income for the median household in California.
- About 1 month(s) of rent for a renter paying the fair market rent in California or about 4/5 month(s) of mortgage payments for the average homeowner in California.
- About 9 week(s) of groceries for a family in California.

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

- \$0-\$100: 2,889 cases (5.4% of all cases)
- \$100-\$500: 6,276 cases (11.7% of all cases)
- \$500-\$1,000: 5,954 cases (11.1% of all cases)
- \$1,000-\$2,000: 6,608 cases (12.3% of all cases)
- \$2,000-\$5,000: 11,764 cases (21.9% of all cases)
- \$5,000-\$10,000: 8,969 cases (16.7% of all cases)

- \$10,000+: 11,283 cases (21.0% of all cases)

Amounts paid to claimants

About 42% of the 63,442 wage theft cases provided to CBS News by the California Department of Industrial Relations showed a payment was made to the claimant. The total amount paid to claimants was \$126,853,456.27.

Just because a person was paid doesn't mean they were paid the full amount they claimed: 28% of the cases were paid in full.

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 California was about 439 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: 1 cases (0.0% of all cases)
- 30-60 days days: 6 cases (0.0% of all cases)
- 60-90 days days: 16 cases (0.1% of all cases)
- 90-180 days days: 719 cases (5.8% of all cases)
- 180-360 days days: 3,722 cases (30.1% of all cases)
- 360-720 days days: 5,224 cases (42.2% of all cases)
- 720+ days days: 2,678 cases (21.7% 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 California Department of Industrial Relations by CBS News through a public records request under the California 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 California 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 California Department of Industrial Relations, 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.