

# **Spitzer Speaks at Groundbreaking Conference on Minimum Wage Enforcement**

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## **Spitzer Speaks at Groundbreaking Conference on Minimum Wage Enforcement**

*Diverse Groups from Across the Country Gather to Combat Labor  
Violations*

**New York, NY** — New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer gave the keynote address to over 70 community and labor groups from across the country today at the groundbreaking national conference “Enforcing the Minimum Wage for Working Families: A Conference on New Strategies for Communities and Government,” held at New York University School of Law. The conference brought together an impressive array of community and labor activists, advocates and government officials to craft innovative solutions to minimum wage and overtime violations.

This conference comes on the heels of the recent New York state minimum wage increase from \$5.15 to \$6.00 dollars an hour. In response to the aftermath of stories about low-wage workers and employers' lack of knowledge on the increase, Attorney General Spitzer held meetings to inform them of the increased wage and offered his support in enforcing their rights.

“Unfortunately the struggle for workers’ rights did not end in 1935. While workers acquired the right to a minimum wage and a right to organize, a right without enforcement is no right at all,” Spitzer told the 200 people at the conference.

“Enforcing the Minimum Wage for Working Families” comes at a crucial time when wage and hour violations are a growing problem. In response to the lack of enforcement, the conference briefings highlighted successful and creative community-government collaboration models as well as legislative and industry-based initiatives to protect and enforce minimum wage standards.

“The level of recent worker-led activity around enforcement of the most basic rights to be paid the minimum wage and overtime is astonishing,” said Catherine Ruckelshaus, Litigation Director of the National Employment Law Project. “We've worked with groups fighting for wages for day laborers, janitors, home health care workers, dry wallers, poultry plant processors, painters, retail workers, taxi and truck drivers, to name a few, and all of them are saying the same thing: 'pay us for the work we do, and don't take us for granted!'”

According to research, compliance levels with the Fair Labor Standards Act are as low as 5% in restaurants and 35% in hotels and motels. Some 60% of nursing homes violate the act. By one estimate, workers would receive an additional \$19 billion annually if employers obeyed the law. There are significant economic effects resulting from

these pervasive violations, including a downward pull on wages and work conditions in the general labor market, depressed living standards and diminished consumer purchasing power.

“This conference is the first step in what we hope will be a national effort to end the widespread exploitation of low-wage and immigrant workers,” says Annette Bernhardt, Senior Policy Analyst at the Brennan Center for Justice. “Working families deserve to earn their fair share after a hard day’s work – anything else is unacceptable.”

The conference is sponsored by the National Employment Law Project (NELP) and the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law.