



National Employment
Law Project

City Council Considers Responsible Restaurant Act to Clean Up Wage Violations in Restaurant Industry

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Responsible Restaurant Act Will Encourage Restaurants to Follow the Law; Supported by National Employment Law Project and Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York

New York, New York – The New York City Council’s Health Committee holds a hearing today to consider an innovative proposal to help protect New York City’s restaurant workers and responsible restaurant owners by improving compliance with the minimum wage and other employment laws. Backed by the National Employment Law Project (NELP) and the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY), the proposed Responsible Restaurant Act would require the city to consider a restaurant’s compliance with employment laws when deciding whether to renew its operating permit.

The restaurant industry is one of New York’s largest sectors, providing jobs for more than 165,000 New Yorkers and serving millions of patrons each week. However, wages in the industry are some of the city’s lowest, and violations of employment law protections are widespread. As detailed in a [study released by researchers from NELP last year](#), many restaurants pay less than the minimum wage, don’t pay overtime, and discriminate in hiring and promotions.

“Too many restaurants end up breaking the law in an attempt to cut costs,” said LaNysha Adams, policy organizer for ROC-NY. “That undermines New York City’s workforce and its economy,” she added.

The Responsible Restaurant Act uses the city’s restaurant permitting system to begin reversing this trend. “The city already has the authority to suspend or deny a restaurant’s permit if it has a record of violating the law,” said Raj Nayak, an attorney at NELP, which worked closely with the city council to design the proposed law. “The Responsible Restaurant Act encourages the city to take employment law violations more seriously and creates a process to help decide when repeated violations warrant suspending a restaurant’s permit.”

The proposal will require restaurants to disclose to the city any employment law violations when they renew their operating permits every two years. The law will also allow the public to bring violations to the city’s attention, will make records of violations available on-line, and will allow the City to hold public hearings to gather more information.

“Restaurant workers have told us about being illegally fined just for calling in sick,” said Council Member Rosie Mendez, one of the bill’s lead sponsors. “These practices don’t just hurt workers and responsible owners, but they threaten the health of the millions of New Yorkers who patronize our restaurants.”

Council Members Mendez and Eric Gioia are the bill’s lead sponsors, with 25 cosponsors from around the city. The proposal’s next step will be a second hearing before the Health Committee.

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