

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Introduces legislation to help stop child labor

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined her colleagues in introducing new legislation to help stop illegal child labor. The Child Labor Prevention Act would increase maximum fines for violations and establish new criminal penalties to deter child labor and hold employers accountable.

“In no world is it acceptable for employers to be making money off child labor and our laws must reflect that by cracking down on the exploitation of children,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “I’m proud to support the *Child Labor Prevention Act* because it will help keep our kids safe and hold these bad actors accountable.”

Since 2018, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has seen a 69 percent increase in children being employed illegally. This is due to companies increasingly circumventing child labor laws to fill positions, which is expected to worsen due to the tight labor market. Because of this crisis, on Monday the Department of Labor and Department of Health and Human Services announced a new effort to combat exploitative child labor, including a call for Congress to increase civil monetary penalties. Currently, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) imposes weak fines for violations, making it financially easier for companies to skirt child labor laws.

Recently, a Wisconsin based company was penalized for illegally employing more than 100 children in hazardous occupations, such as working with chemicals and cleaning meat processing equipment.

In addition, last month, DOL announced it found more than 100 children across eight states cleaning dangerous meat processing equipment using hazardous chemicals for a contractor of major meat producer JBS Foods. While several child workers were injured on the job, DOL levied its maximum fine, just \$15,138 for each

count.

In some instances, employers have also begun classifying children as independent contractors, using a loophole in the FLSA that prohibits the employment of minors, but allows companies to use them as independent contractors.

To stop child labor and hold employers accountable, the Child Labor Prevention Act would:

- Increase maximum employer civil penalties from:
 - \$5,000 minimum – \$132,270 maximum for routine violations; and
 - \$25,000 minimum – \$601,150 maximum for each violation that causes the death or serious injury of a minor.
- Establish criminal penalties for a repeat or willful violation of child labor laws to include a fine of up to \$50,000 and a year in jail;
- Ensure that all working minors, regardless of classification, are covered by the existing protections in the FLSA; and
- Index all penalties to the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) to ensure they increase over time.

In addition to Senator Baldwin, this legislation is cosponsored by U.S. Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI), Dick Durbin (D-IL), John Fetterman (D-PA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Brian Schatz (D-HI), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).