



A WIN-WIN SOLUTION

Solving Both Chicago's
Youth Employment Crisis and
Restaurant Industry Crisis
Through One Fair Wage

INTRODUCTION

On May 15, 2023, Mayor Brandon Johnson signed his first executive order as mayor of Chicago. The order focused on boosting youth employment in the city and directed the city government to evaluate all possible youth employment programs and prioritize the issue.¹ The mayor clearly recognizes the extent of the crisis; Mayor Johnson declared that he seeks to double the number of working teens in an effort to curb crime.² Studies have found increasing youth employment in Chicago can reduce violent crime among teens.³



At the same time that Chicago seeks to increase youth employment, one of the city's largest industries is desperate to hire staff. The restaurant industry continues to face the worst staffing crisis in its history and is not even back to prepandemic staffing levels.⁴ **As a result, the need to ensure youth are employed and the restaurant industry's need for employees could be a win-win solution, but only if the industry's long history of poverty wages is addressed.**

With 57,000 workers aged 16-24, the service sector is the largest employer of young people in Chicago.⁵ Restaurants alone employ 13 percent of all young people in the city of Chicago and could easily be a source of 'high road' employment for young people. Restaurants can provide sustainable high-quality, dignified employment for young people and give them career pathways that allow these young workers to advance to family-sustaining incomes. Indeed, hundreds of Chicago restaurants have raised wages dramatically to recruit staff, demonstrating that living-wage jobs are possible in the sector, and servers in fine dining restaurants in Chicago can earn more than \$55,000 annually.^{6,7} Unfortunately, most employers do not currently follow this pathway; the restaurant industry is one of the lowest-paying industries with little to no mobility, which is largely due to the fact that the majority of Chicago restaurants still pay tipped workers a subminimum wage.⁸

A direct legacy of slavery, the subminimum wage for tipped workers in Chicago has been a source of both poverty and sexual harassment for a workforce that is mostly women and people of color.⁹ With the pandemic, these workers began leaving the industry en masse due to low wages and meager tips. By April 2023, the Chicago area's restaurant industry is still below pre pandemic level, with 6,000 fewer workers than in February 2020, and 8,000 fewer workers than the industry's peak in the area, in August 2017.¹⁰

Chicago is now at a fork in the road. It can continue to allow one of the largest employers of youth to pay a subminimum wage that subjects these youth to the highest rates of economic

instability and sexual harassment of any industry, and very little mobility to the industry's highest-paying positions. Or Chicago can work on solutions to end the subminimum wage, boost youth employment, and in the process reduce the city's violent crime rate.

By requiring and supporting restaurant employers to pay all staff One Fair Wage – a full minimum wage with tips on top — and increase mobility, Chicago could increase youth employment, lower violent crime, and alleviate the restaurant industry's self-made staffing crisis.



PATHWAY 1: **THE STATUS QUO**

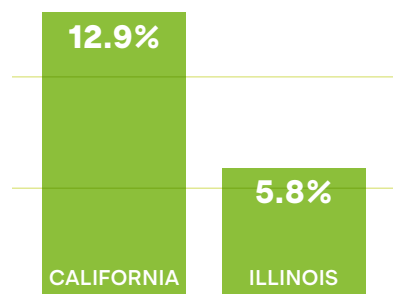
› The restaurant industry is the largest employer of youth ages 16–24 in Chicago, employing 13 percent of all employed young people, but it is also one of the lowest-paying, offering a median wage of \$15.52¹¹. Young workers make up 28 percent of the restaurant workforce and nearly one-third (31 percent) of tipped restaurant staff. Given that restaurants are the first job for 1 in 3 Americans, the subminimum wage for tipped workers exposes a workforce of young women in Chicago to the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry, impacting their expectations for work throughout their lifetime.^{12,13}

- › While workers in the top fifth of Chicago's restaurant industry earn on average over \$55,000 a year, these jobs are held almost entirely by white men.^{14,15} Youth of color are blocked from obtaining these jobs due to racial and gender segregation in the industry.¹⁶
- › In response to the worker exodus, the National Restaurant Association has been a leader in fighting to weaken child labor laws in multiple states, which would allow them to hire more young people at poverty wages, subjecting them to extremely unsafe environments with life-long implications.¹⁷

PATHWAY 2: **THE 'HIGH ROAD' FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

- › A One Fair Wage review of job postings identified that over 200 restaurants in the state of Illinois have transitioned to paying fair wages — paying at least the full minimum wage with tips on top — with over half of them in Chicago.¹⁸
- › Through One Fair Wage's High Road Kitchens program and related toolkit, One Fair Wage Employer Database, One Fair Wage has provided free training and technical assistance to help hundreds of restaurants in Chicago and nationwide to increase mobility for workers of color and women of color to the highest-paying positions in the industry.^{19,20}

TABLE 2 | Small Businesses Opening in the Restaurant Industry



Source: Opportunity Insights Economic Tracker.²⁴

➤ In the fair wage state of California, the Los Angeles metropolitan area has recovered a larger percentage of restaurant workers, with employment in the industry at 98.7 percent of pre-pandemic levels, than the Chicago metropolitan area, with employment in the industry at 96.6 percent of pre-pandemic levels.^{21,22} The state of California has also seen a 12.9 percent increase in small businesses opening in the restaurant industry, higher than in Illinois which has seen a 5.8 percent increase small business growth in the restaurant industry.²³



BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Chicago is an important epicenter for economic and racial justice. It is the birthplace of the first Black union in the US and the hometown of the first Black woman in the U.S. Senate and the first Black American president. It is also a place where an anti-union bombing is remembered each May 1st as International Labor Day.²⁵ It is also a place that still allows a subminimum wage system for tipped workers which is a direct legacy of slavery.

Chicago has a rich and complex history of economic and civil rights advancements for Black Americans. In 1862, George Pullman founded the Pullman Company. A pioneer in manufacturing, Pullman's company was one of the first railroad car manufacturing companies to mass-produce sleeping cars. After the Civil War, Pullman hired thousands of formerly enslaved Black Americans to work on his trains as porters carrying luggage for White Americans but did not pay them a wage, forcing them to live on tips alone. In 1909, Pullman workers attempted to unionize and were met with fierce opposition. It was not until 1925, with Pullman porter A. Philip Randolph leading his fellow workers, that they succeeded, and in doing so formed the first Black union with the motto "Fight or Be Slaves."²⁶ This first Black union in Chicago, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was a vitally important part of the formation of the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, E. D. Nixon, a major organizer of the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama, was a former Pullman porter.²⁷

However, while these Black Chicagoans won the right to an actual wage, Black women hired by the restaurant industry who were forced to live on tips were not so fortunate. In response to the Pullman car porter organizing, Chicago restaurants formed the National Restaurant Association in 1919 with the express mission of suppressing food workers' wages — and have thus ensured that their workers never obtained a full minimum wage and were forced to live on tips.²⁸ Unfortunately, the city that played such an important role in ending the practice of forcing workers to live on tips in one sector continues to allow this practice to exist more than 100 years later in the restaurant sector.

A direct legacy of slavery, the subminimum wage for tipped workers is still \$2.13 an hour at the federal level and persists in 43 states nationwide.¹⁹ In Chicago, the subminimum wage is still

just \$8.70 per hour, exempting restaurants from paying the city’s full minimum wage of \$15 per hour. This subminimum wage impacts a Chicago workforce of almost 100,000 tipped workers, 44 percent of whom are women and 55 percent of whom are people of color.³⁰ Nationwide, The subminimum wage forces a population of tipped workers that is overwhelmingly women and disproportionately women of color to rely on customer tips for the majority of their income, making them more vulnerable than other workers to the race and gender inequities of tipping.³¹

Even with tips, the subminimum wage for tipped workers results in Chicago restaurant workers earning less than they need to cover the basic cost of living. The MIT living wage calculator estimated a single person would need to earn \$19.23 per hour to pay living expenses in Cook County.³² Yet, Chicago front-of-house workers earn on average \$15.58 including tips, and Chicago back-of-house workers in the industry earn \$15.48.³³

PATHWAY 1: THE STATUS QUO

Service occupations, including restaurant work, employ the largest number of young workers of any sector in Chicago. The Chicago restaurant industry alone employs 27,000 young workers or 13 percent of all employed 16 – 24 year-olds³⁴. Nearly one-third (31 percent) of tipped restaurant staff are youth ages 16–24. Women of color make up 25 percent of younger workers in the Chicago restaurant industry and 29 percent of young tipped workers.³⁵

TABLE 2 | Occupations of workers 16 – 24

INDUSTRY	WORKERS AGED 16–24
Service Occupations	57,107
Sales and Related Occupations	34,100
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	33,276
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	25,972
Education, Legal, Community Service, Arts, and Media Occupations	20,941
Management, Business, and Financial Occupations	17,441
Computer, Engineering, and Science Occupations	9,972
Production Occupations	6,902
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	4,060
Construction and Extraction Occupations	3,342
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	2,118
Non-restaurant Tipped Workers	823
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	312
Total	216,366

Given that restaurants are the first job for 1 in 3 Americans, the subminimum wage for tipped workers exposes a workforce of young women in Chicago to the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry, impacting their expectations for work throughout their lifetime.³⁶

Furthermore, there is currently little mobility for youth workers to higher-paying positions in the industry. While the top quintile of Chicago restaurant workers earns on average \$55,000 a year, these jobs are held almost entirely by white men.³⁷ Youth of color are blocked from obtaining these jobs due to segregation in industry segment and position.³⁸ Young people of color also continually face higher unemployment rates than their white counterparts.³⁹

With the pandemic, a majority of tipped workers in Chicago reported that their tips decreased and sexual harassment, already the highest of any industry, increased, with thousands of women reporting that they were asked to remove their masks so that male customers could judge their looks and their tips on that basis.⁴⁰ When they were asked to enforce COVID protocols on the same customers from whom they had to get tips to survive, they started leaving en masse.⁴¹ By April 2023, the Chicago area's restaurant industry is still below pre pandemic level, with 6,000

fewer workers than in February 2020, and 8,000 fewer workers than the industry's peak in the area, in August 2017.⁴² Of those who remain, 64 percent of Chicago restaurant workers say they are leaving or have already left the industry, and 47 percent say the main factor that would make them stay or return to working in restaurants would be a full, livable wage with tips on top.⁴³

In response to the restaurant worker exodus, the National Restaurant Association (NRA) has been a leader in the fight to weaken child labor laws in multiple states.⁴⁴ The restaurant lobby has been actively working to remove minor work permit requirements that allow governments to monitor employers and increase the hours children can work while in school. The lobby has even declared on its website that child labor is the answer to the industry's worker shortage.⁴⁵

While the NRA works to end child labor protections, the number of child labor violations is on the rise. Since 2018, the U.S. Department of Labor has documented a 69 percent increase in children being employed illegally.⁴⁶ This is happening despite the fact that youth participation in the workforce has been done as more young people look to complete schooling and school-related extracurricular activities. The restaurant industry represents the vast majority of child labor abuses. Restaurants are the worst offenders of child labor violations. The industry accounts for over 64 percent of child-labor violations.⁴⁷



PATHWAY 2:

THE HIGH ROAD TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

High youth unemployment and low wages in the restaurant industry does not have to be Chicago's fate. A One Fair Wage review of job postings identified that over 200 restaurants in the state of Illinois have transitioned to paying fair wages – paying at least the full minimum wage with tips on top – with over half of them in Chicago.⁴⁸

TABLE 2 | Chicago restaurants transitioning to or paying fair wages.

Restaurant	City	Hourly Starting Wage	Restaurant	City	Hourly Starting Wage
Lula Cafe	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15	Bar Sotano	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Split-Rail	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15	Boulevard Sports Lounge	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
The Grail Cafe	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15	Bureau Bar	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Flour Power	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15	Carmelo's Tace Place	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Honky Tonk BBQ	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15	Cousin's Grill	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
5 Loaves Eatery	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15	Don Pedro Mexican Rest.	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Superkhana	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15	El Nandu Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Big Jones	Chicago	\$16.00	Flammin Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Cabra	Chicago	\$17.00	Herb Thai Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Sushi by Bou	Chicago	\$15.00	Huaraches Dona Chio	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Radio Room	Chicago	\$15.00	Huaraches Mexican Rest.	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Tequila CJ	Chicago	\$13.00	Josephine's Southern Cooking	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Budlong Hot Chicken	Chicago	\$20.00	Broken Barrel Bar	Chicago	\$18.00
The X Pot	Chicago	\$14.00	Barangaroos	Chicago	\$15.00
Junebug Cafe	Chicago	\$14.00	Baba Pita	Chicago	\$13.00
Tanaka Ramen	Chicago	\$14.00	Chicago Oyster House	Chicago	\$15.00
Second City Theaters	Chicago	\$14.00	Berghoff Restaurant	Chicago	\$20.00
Scofflaw Group	Chicago	\$11.00	Burger Theory	Chicago	\$15.00
The Darling	Chicago	\$11.00	The Sit Down Cafe & Sushi Bar	Chicago	\$14.00
Ella's BBQ	Chicago	\$16.00	Kingston Mines	Chicago	\$15.00
Ed Debevic's	Chicago	\$15.00	Jefferson Tap & Grill	Chicago	\$15.00
Kitchen United	Chicago	\$15.50	The Clare	Chicago	\$16.00
Sunda	Chicago	\$15.00	MJB Restaurant Group	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Qiao Lin Hotpot	Chicago	\$15.00	Marshall's Landing	Chicago	\$14.00
Siena Tavern in River North	Chicago	\$15.00	Little Wok	Chicago	\$14.00
Adelaide Hall	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15			

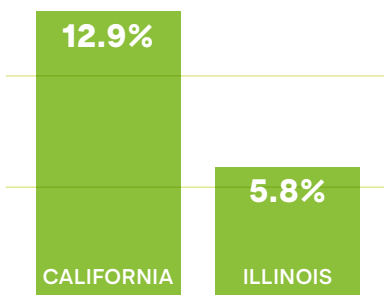
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Restaurant	City	Hourly Starting Wage
The Aviary	Chicago	\$18.25
Alinea	Chicago	\$18.50
Roister	Chicago	\$18.50
Basil Leaf Cafe	Chicago	\$17.00
Tiny Tapp Cafe	Chicago	\$18.00
Tall Ship Windy	Chicago	\$15.00
Sushi Hall	Chicago	\$15.00
The Breakfast Club	Chicago	\$14.50
Goddess and the Baker	Chicago	\$16.00
Jarabe	Chicago	\$15.00
Truluck's	Chicago	\$16.00
All Star Seafood & Sports	Chicago	\$20.00
LondonHouse	Chicago	\$13.30
Tac Quick	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Chai Asian Bistro	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Cocoa Chili Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Doughboy's Chicago	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Flavor Cajun South Loop	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Golden Thai Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Carmelos Taco Place	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Herb Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Huaraches Doña Chio	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Immm	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Indie Cafe	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Rock Wrap & Roll	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Jaiyen Sushi & Noodle	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Kinnaree Thai Kitchen	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Lizzy J Cafe	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Mole Village	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Nana Organic	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Nipsey's Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Noodles Etc	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15

Restaurant	City	Hourly Starting Wage
Peach's on 47th	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Pearl's Place Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Peke's Pozole	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Ruk Edgebrook	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Ruk Kimball	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Windy City Ribs & Whiskey	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Salsa's Grill	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Satay Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Silver Spoon Thai Rest.	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Snakes & Lattes	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Sol de Mexico	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Spoon Thai	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
TaKOREA Cocina	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Tanuki Sushi & Grill	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
The New Look Salon and Rest.	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
The Woodlawn	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Wherewithall	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Windy City Café	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Wynwood Kitchen & Spirits	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Arun's Thai Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Superkhana International	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Jibaritos on Harlem	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
La Humita Restaurant	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
DeColores Pilsen	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Jayien Sushi & Noodle	Chicago	Transitioning to \$15
Gino's East & the Comedy Bar	Chicago	\$20.00
Le Sud	Chicago	\$20.00
Bartucci Italian Bar	Chicago	\$15.00
Nobu Chicago	Chicago	\$18.00
The Evie	Chicago	\$17.00
Osteria Via Stato	Chicago	\$20.00
The Crab Pad	Chicago	\$16.00

Through One Fair Wage’s High Road Kitchens program and related toolkit, Restaurants’ Guide to High Road Employment,⁴⁹ One Fair Wage has provided free training and technical assistance to help hundreds of restaurants in Chicago and nationwide to increase mobility for workers of color and women of color to the highest paying positions in the industry. There are very high-paying positions in the industry — the top quintile of servers in Chicago earns an average wage of \$55,000, with half of all servers in that quintile earning more.⁵⁰ One Fair Wage’s free training and technical assistance program helps show employers how to increase mobility for workers of color and women to these highest-paying positions. One Fair Wage’s Racial Equity Toolkit, provided as part of this program, makes employers undergo implicit bias testing and training and then helps them overhaul their recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, and evaluation practices to increase equity and mobility for workers of color. A deep impact analysis of the program in California showed restaurants that participated increased their wages on average of 33 percent.⁵¹

TABLE 3 | Small Businesses Opening in the Restaurant Industry



Source: Opportunity Insights Economic Tracker.⁵⁵

Being a fair wage state has paid off for California. The state of California has seen a 12.9 percent increase in small businesses opening in the restaurant industry, higher than in Illinois which has seen less than half as much growth with just a 5.8 percent increase in small business growth in the restaurant industry.⁵² The Los Angeles metropolitan area has also recovered a larger percentage of restaurant workers than the Chicago metropolitan area. The Los Angeles metropolitan area has seen employment in the industry return to 98.7 percent of employment in February 2020, while the Chicago metropolitan area has only seen employment in the industry reach 96.6 percent of employment levels.^{53,54}

The city of Chicago can join the District of Columbia in raising wages to catch up with the seven states that already pay the full minimum wage with tips on top.

CONCLUSION

If the City of Chicago seeks to double the number of youth employed in the city, it is essential to enact One Fair Wage. This would assist in getting thousands of workers back into the Chicago restaurant industry, including getting more young people to join the workforce.

One Fair Wage would solve the restaurant industry’s staffing crisis, while also increasing youth employment and lowering violent crime. One Fair Wage is an important step for the City to provide livable wages, safe work environments, and career pathways.

The National Restaurant Association may not care about curbing crime, or wish for young workers to still have basic workplace protections, or prioritize ensuring that workers are paid a living wage. Yet, Chicago cannot afford to let one business interest group dictate the future well-being and safety of the City. Chicago can take a major step for young people — and all workers and citizens — by ending the subminimum wage for tipped workers and making Chicago a fair wage city.



ENDNOTES

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