

Ten-year-olds found working at McDonald's in Louisville, Kentucky

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Two 10-year-olds worked at a McDonald's restaurant in Louisville, Kentucky, serving customers, cleaning the restaurant and manning the deep fryer, sometimes until 2 a.m. in the morning, according to a report for the federal Department of Labor (DOL) Wage and Hour Division.

The report released on Tuesday disclosed that three franchises operating 62 McDonald's restaurants in Kentucky, Indiana, Maryland and Ohio employed 305 children beyond the legally permitted hours and had them perform tasks prohibited by law for their age. The franchises were fined a total of \$212,754.

In the Louisville restaurant, investigators discovered the 10-year-olds were allegedly visiting a parent who is a night manager at the location. The children were not employees of McDonald's nor were they paid for their labor.

These citations are only the latest of several violations of child labor laws by McDonald's, the most horrifying resulting in a 15 year old in Morristown, Tennessee, being severely burned while working a deep fryer in June 2022.

The latest DOL report of McDonald's child labor law violations is one of several within the past year. In December 2022, a McDonald's franchisee with 13 locations in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area was fined for violations involving 101 minor workers. In February 2023, a franchise with restaurants in Erie and Warren, Pennsylvania, incurred citations covering 154 minors for exceeding the number of hours 14 and 15-year-olds are allowed to work and for allowing employees under 16 years old to operate deep fryers.

According to the Wage and Hour Division's report, most of the violations they find are cases of minors working more hours than the law permits. However, the report also notes their investigators found 688 minors

illegally employed in hazardous jobs in 2022, "the highest annual count since fiscal year 2011." In 2011, investigators reported 949 violations, but since 2015 cases of children working in hazardous occupations have increased 94 percent.

Indeed, as reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* in February, Packers Sanitation Services Inc. illegally contracted out 102 children, ages 13–17, to clean the facilities for some of the largest meatpacking plants including JBS Foods, Tyson and Cargill. According to the report issued by the DOL's Wage and Hour Division, the minors' work involved "hazardous chemicals and cleaning meat processing equipment including back saws, brisket saws, and head splitters."

Additionally, last summer Reuters exposed that up to 10 parts suppliers for Hyundai-Kia in Alabama employed children as young as 12 years old to work in a metal stamping plant. As reported by the WSWS, only one of the facilities involved has been sanctioned.

McDonald's violations of child labor laws come as a bill that eliminates many labor protections for minors continues to move through Iowa's Republican-led legislature. If passed, Iowa will join Arkansas in loosening requirements that protect the youngest workers, aged 14 and 15. Iowa's law would permit children as young as 15 to work on assembly lines and allow 14½ year olds to drive themselves up to 50 miles to and from work. Iowa is among eight states that have introduced similar bills, including Minnesota, whose bill is controversial because, if passed, it will allow minors to work on construction sites.

According to a report by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), the assault from state legislatures on child labor laws is an effort by the ruling elites to undermine federal labor laws which were enacted nearly 100 years ago, effectively ending employment of

minors which endangered their health or impeded their education. Employers are struggling with a shortage of workers willing to work for substandard wages, so younger workers will now supposed to pick up the slack.

In fact, the pool of minors in the workforce has diminished as high school graduation rates have risen. The proportion of 16-year-olds in the workforce has decreased from 65.8 percent in 2000 to 55.6 percent in 2022. The drop, according to the EPI report, is due to more young people choosing to finish school, and students and families choosing sports and enrichment activities over work.

Of course, the push for relaxed labor laws will inordinately impact minors from working class and immigrant families. Conditions are going backward to days of the late 19th and early 20th centuries when children were routinely exploited in the factories and mines, before the mass struggles of the working class forced the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938.

As was exposed in the cases of Packers Sanitation Services Inc. and Hyundai-Kia, immigrant children are particularly vulnerable to the predations of unscrupulous employers and hiring practices.

According to a *New York Times* investigation earlier this year, two-thirds of unaccompanied minors crossing into the United States work full-time despite sponsors agreeing to send the children to school and seeing to their welfare. The *Times* reported that child immigrants compose a “shadow workforce” that stretches across all 50 states.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), tasked with vetting sponsors to protect immigrant children from trafficking and exploitation, is overwhelmed by the influx of minors since 2021 and is rushing the process. Last year, 130,000 unaccompanied minors entered the United States; the HHS has lost contact with 85,000 after an initial check-in with their sponsors. Up to a third of the children were never heard from again upon being released by the HHS.

In April, the WSWs wrote,

Youth have no future under capitalism. The continued existence of this form of society is predicated upon the cannibalizing of all the

social and cultural achievements of the past. In the sense of technical and scientific developments, humanity long ago created the means to eliminate poverty, war, pandemics, environmental destruction and every other social problem. That all of these are reemerging today with a vengeance is for one reason only: the capitalist profit system.

Confronted today by poverty, social inequality, the drive toward world war, and the increasingly anti-democratic actions by government’s internationally, it rests with the youth of society to build a movement to restore the forward momentum of progress and social equality and by re-establishing society based on the principles of socialism.



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