ED & WORKFORCE DEMOCRATS

FACT SHEET

House Committee on Education and the Workforce
Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Protecting Children Act

Abusive child labor practices are rising.
Children should be learning and growing in schools, not risking their safety and lives in dangerous workplaces. Unfortunately, 87 years after the passage of the *Fair Labor Standards Act* (FLSA), recent news reports have underscored that children are continuing to be illegally employed in hazardous jobs and working conditions. These reports revealed children struggling to keep up in school and suffering burns and disabling injuries from late-night shifts cleaning meatpacking plants, overnight shifts at McDonald's, and work in auto parts factories.

According to the **Wage and Hour Division**, the number of children employed in violation of child labor laws nearly quadrupled between 2015 and 2024.

The federal government does not have the resources to adequately monitor, prevent, or address child labor violations.
The surge in child labor violations is happening at a time when federal worker protection agencies are starved of resources. The Department of Labor's (DOL) Wage and Hour Division (WHD) has been forced to cut the personnel hours spent on child labor enforcement every year since FY 2017 due to budget constraints. The Trump Administration's FY 2026 budget plan would cut WHD by close to 10 percent.

There is also less capacity for research and data on the scope of the problem than ever before. In 2015, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) discontinued a survey on injuries and fatalities among children farmworkers because of decades of budget cuts. The Trump Administration would eliminate all NIOSH research on children and young workers.

Republican politicians are making children more vulnerable to abusive working conditions.
Republican state legislators across the country are **pushing** proposals to roll back essential child labor protections. According to the **Economic Policy Institute**, seven states have enacted rollbacks since 2021. For example, in 2023, Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed into law a bill repealing safeguards, such as age verification on work for 14- and 15-year-olds. The **Project 2025** roadmap for the Trump Administration would go even further by rolling back rules prohibiting the employment of children in particularly dangerous jobs.

The Solution:
The *Protecting Children Act* is the most robust proposal to renew our commitment to ending oppressive child labor. The legislation:

- Increases civil and criminal penalties for child labor violations, unsafe workplaces, and workplace injuries and deaths experienced by young workers;
- Strengthens WHD's ability to prevent the sale and movement of goods produced in violation of child labor rules;
- Expands capacity for enforcement, research, and data;
- Improves the process for updating child labor rules and prohibits any future weakening of those rules; and
- Launches public information initiatives to keep policymakers and public informed about child labor enforcement and train young workers on their rights.