

Government Enforcement Lab Session

SEIU's Fast Food Council Campaign strategy to win fair wages, safe working conditions and reach scale.

Weds September 13, 2023

A conversation with **Maria Maldonado** and **Adam Weisberg** from **SEIU's California Fast Food Organizing Campaign** on how they are incorporating creative organizing and enforcement strategies into their campaign to set up a Fast Food Standards Board in California.

Session Summary and [session slides](#)

The Issues

- Fast food workers = 80% people of color, 60% are Latino.
- Twice likely to live in poverty without any benefits like no sick leave
- Some of the major working conditions include extreme heat, sexual harassment, wage theft, retaliation (including reducing hours after min wage increase go into affect)
- One worker was told *"it's not so hot, it's your menopause"* when it was 109 degrees in Sacramento! She ultimately won 11K for breaks.
- Employers are repeat offenders, retaliating against many employees.
- Employers will make people work under 2 or more names to avoid paying overtime.
- Employers would never try these abusive tactics on other workers -- who know the laws and policies and have voice and power.

The Strategy

- The fundamental campaign goal is to build power and voice -- while winning specific policies. We can win \$15...but without winning voice. We want to do both.
- POWER is the key word. Giving employees power and knowledge
- Look at it from a holistic point of view → make sure workers are aware of policies. Bring workers to fight at every level.
- Monolingual speakers need access and space to [tell their stories](#). We can't file enough complaints to solve the problem -- but we can tell their stories with agencies and elected officials to shift policies.
- A great example is Crystal Orozco who had worked at Jack in the Box for 16 years. She didn't even know she was experiencing wage theft until she saw workers at another Jack in the Box with the FF 15 on strike for a similar issue that she realized she needed to speak up. We started out guiding her through a complaint at her store - for wage theft and extreme heat. She and her co-workers went on strike and got a lot of press coverage about what was going on inside their store. She's gone on to tell her story to elected officials and inspire other workers to share theirs as well.

The Fast Food Council

- The **Fast Food Council** is a way to allow workers to be part of the process. It brings workers, employers, agencies, and the government together to understand what are the issues and how to address them.
- The state already has all the regulatory power -- on wages, safety conditions etc. But it's scattered across different agencies -- so very hard to access and weigh in. eg on heat standards etc.
- The Fast Food Council is a place for workers to weigh in and win improvements about all types of conditions: heat, security, pay standards. An organized body of workers creates a focal point of a place to win, and to build a shared vision and goal
- As we designed the Council - we built in a feedback space for workers so they can be a part of the standard setting program.
- The Council is required to hold two hearings a year -- in different parts of the state. This gives you an opportunity every six months to organize for change.
- And every three years -- the Council needs to review the minimum standards -- with input from workers and from local agencies. This creates a high point of energy -- to drive the demand.
- We will work to win what we can via the Council. And if we can't move it there, organized workers will press their demand and find a way.

Key Cycle

- Voice, agency, organize, hearings, file complaints, win every 3 years

Background Materials on the Campaign and Fast Food Accountability and Standards Recovery Act (FAST Act)

- [California Fast-Food Workers Secure Big Win in Compromise Deal](#) 9.18.23 OnLabo
- [Half a Million California Workers Get a Raise—and a Seat at the Table](#) 9.13.23 The American Prospect
- [All Eyes on California as Fast-Food Worker Rights Land on the 2024 Ballot](#) March 2023, Civil Eats
- LA Times article with [background on bill & opposition](#)
- [New California Board Has Power to Order Pay Raises & Protections for Workers](#). Capital & Main Aug 2023
- [How a new California law for fast-food workers can set a path for industries nationwide](#) LA Times OpEd Aug 2023

*The workplace justice lab@Rutgers University with Jobs with Justice and the Always Essential Worker Power Table convened the **Governance and Enforcement Lab (GEL)** as a space where organizers and advocates can think together about how to leverage labor policy and enforcement structures at the local and state level to build worker power and organization.*