

UNITE**HERE!** Local 11

June 11, 2025

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Re: Request for Investigation of Alleged Fraudulent Inducement of Voters by Proponents of Referendum of Minimum Wage Ordinance for Tourism Workers (Ord. No. 188610)

Attorney General Bonta, District Attorney Hochman, and City Attorney Feldstein Soto:

We write to alert your offices to serious misconduct and probable violations of law committed by proponents of the referendum of an ordinance enacted by the City of Los Angeles to raise wages for tourism workers (the “Minimum Wage Ordinance”) and their petition circulators.¹ This conduct includes egregious misrepresentations of the content and effect of the referendum petition, failure to provide the public with required funding notices, potential tampering with or adding text to petitions where only writing by voters is permitted, and—perhaps of most concern—violence by petition circulators. The referendum petition is funded by Delta Airlines, United Airlines, and the American Hotel and Lodging Association.²

¹ The official title of the Minimum Wage Ordinance is the Ordinance to Increase the Wages and Health Benefits Provided to Hotel and Airport Workers in the City of Los Angeles, to Provide Training Requirements and Implement Enforcement Measures for Hotel Workers, and Other Technical Changes (Council File: 14-1371; Ordinance No. 188610).

² Official Top Funders Form for Referendum available at: <https://savejobsla.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/referendum-against-ord.-no-188610-june-2025-official-top-funders.pdf>.

This disturbing pattern of misconduct and deception herein threatens to undermine faith in our democratic process and puts members of the public in harm's way. We respectfully request that the Attorney General, District Attorney, and City Attorney promptly investigate these concerns and take appropriate legal action – including, as appropriate, criminal and/or civil prosecution.

I. Factual Background

On May 14, 2025,³ following more than two years of deliberations, the Los Angeles City Council enacted by a 12-3 margin, and the Mayor subsequently signed into law, the Minimum Wage Ordinance to increase the wages and health benefits provided to hotel and airport workers in the City of Los Angeles, provide training to hotel workers, and make other changes for the benefit of low-wage tourism workers.

On May 29, a group of businesspeople filed paperwork with the City Clerk of Los Angeles to launch a petition to overturn the Minimum Wage Ordinance through a referendum. The referendum effort is supported by a group of businesses called the “L.A. Alliance for Tourism, Jobs and Progress” (“Alliance”), which has received major funding from Delta Airlines, United Airlines, and the American Hotel and Lodging Association. The following day, the Los Angeles Interim City Clerk Petty Santos announced that the petition was approved for circulation.

The Alliance, acting through contracted firms, immediately began to circulate the referendum petition across Los Angeles. From the very beginning of these efforts, the referendum effort has been marked by serious misconduct by circulators. This request to investigate outlines evidence we have gathered primarily during the first week of the Alliance's referendum activities, in four areas of misconduct.

II. Legal Background

California law makes it a misdemeanor to intentionally misrepresent the contents or effect of an initiative petition to a potential signer:

Every person is guilty of a misdemeanor who:

(a) Circulating, as principal or agent, or having charge or control of the circulation of, or obtaining signatures to, any state or local initiative, referendum or recall petition, intentionally misrepresents or intentionally makes any false statement concerning the contents, purport or effect of the petition, or the petition's Official Top Funders disclosure required by Section 107, to any person who signs, or who desires to sign, or who is requested to sign, or who makes inquiries with reference to it, or to whom it is presented for the person's signature.

³ All dates in this letter took place in 2025, unless otherwise stated.

(b) Willfully and knowingly circulates, publishes, or exhibits any false statement or misrepresentation concerning the contents, purport or effect of any state or local initiative, referendum, or recall petition, or the petition's Official Top Funders disclosure required by Section 107, for the purpose of obtaining any signature to, or persuading or influencing any person to sign, that petition. . .

Cal. Elec. Code § 18600.

Knowingly making false statements about a ballot measure petition is a misdemeanor, but even more importantly, it undermines the integrity of our electoral process. For this reason, courts have taken steps to safeguard that process where misrepresentations threatened to induce voters to sign initiative and referendum petitions. In *San Francisco Forty-Niners v. Nishioka*, 75 Cal. App. 4th 637, 650 (1999), for example, the Court of Appeal held that when a court is confronted with an initiative petition that “contains misleading assertions of fact that are false beyond dispute, a writ may issue to prevent the circulation of the undisputed falsehoods.” At issue in *Nishioka* were false statements in an initiative petition that sought to repeal two ballot measures that San Francisco voters approved at the June 1997 election to allow construction of a new football stadium. *Id.* at 640-41. The opponents of those ballot measures launched an initiative drive to repeal the new ballot measures, and in doing so, printed several indisputably false statements in their Notice of Intention, including:

. . . telling a prospective signer that the previous election resulted in a denial of the secrecy ballot for all San Francisco voters when it did not; that the real cost estimates far exceed the upper limit of \$100 million, when that was the absolute ceiling under Proposition D; and that legal issues surrounding the 2/3 majority required by Proposition 218 remain unresolved, when that proposition was not applicable.

Id. at 640-41.

The court concluded that these objectively false representations violated section 18600 because they suggested voters should repeal Propositions D and F for reasons that were objectively untrue. *Id.* at 647. The same concerns are at play with the referendum petitions seeking to appeal the Minimum Wage Ordinance.

Similarly, Election Code of the City of Los Angeles section 702(b) makes it a misdemeanor for “[p]ersons circulating, as principal or agent, or having charge or control of the circulation of, or obtaining signatures. . .” on any local referendum petition to “[i]ntentionally misrepresent or intentionally make any false statement concerning the contents, purport or effect of the petition...” See also L.A. Elec. Code § 116 (failure to comply with the Election Code is a misdemeanor). Further, circulators are prohibited from willfully and knowingly circulating, publishing, or exhibiting false statements and misrepresentations for the purpose of influencing or persuading people from signing a petition. *Id.* at § 702(c).

Further, both state and local law require that each petition signer must personally affix their own signature, printed, name, and address on a referendum petition. See Cal. Elec. Code §

100(b); L.A. Elec. Code § 700(d). Section 700(d) of the Election Code of the City of Los Angeles further requires the signer to personally affix the date they signed the petition.

As discussed below, referendum proponents, the Alliance, and their signature gatherers violate the aforementioned state and local laws designed to ensure that voters are not deliberately misled to sign a referendum petition. The scope of the probable Section 18600 violations committed by the proponents, the Alliance and petition circulators across the City of Los Angeles indicate a serious failure by the proponents to comply with their responsibility to comply with applicable laws.

III. Alleged Violations

a. Misrepresentations by Referendum Petition Circulators

Since the circulation period began for this referendum petition, witnesses have observed petition circulators making false statements and misrepresentations about the referendum's "contents, purport, and effect" in probable violation of California Elections Code section 18600 and City of Los Angeles Election Code section 702. In particular, witnesses have reported circulators making the following false statements about the contents, purport, and effect of the referendum:

- On June 3, at a Target in Los Angeles, a petition circulator told passersby that the petition was to turn a "temporary wage increase into a permanent wage increase." This claim was patently false, as the referendum would in fact eliminate a permanent wage increase.
- On June 3, at an Amazon Fresh in Woodland Hills, a petition circulator said of the petition, "We are trying to get a living wage for hotel workers to start next year, not July 1. Better for the hotels, workers' comp." In fact, the petition would not change the date of a scheduled hotel worker minimum wage increase but would instead eliminate a scheduled increase.
- On June 3, a petition circulator at a Ralphs in Granada Hills told passersby about the petition, "They passed this without the Council's vote, without consent, they're skipping a step, Mayor Bass skipped a step, excluded other airport workers from Ontario and Burbank." This statement was false because the Los Angeles City Council in fact voted to enact the ordinance, and because the City of Los Angeles does not have jurisdiction over Ontario or Burbank workers.
- On June 3, a petition circulator at a Trader Joe's in West Hills told passersby that the petition was about opposing Karen Bass, and said that Karen Bass had unilaterally decided that the Olympic wage ordinance would become law.
- On June 4, at a Ralphs in Woodland Hills, a petition circulator asked passersby to "Sign this petition so that we can increase the minimum wage." The circulator said that the petition was to increase the wage for all employees across all industries. He was stationed at a table with a sign reading, "Fair wages for all businesses, not just hotel workers."

- On June 4, at a Ralphs in Chatsworth, the same petition circulator who threw water on a passerby falsely told voters that Mayor Karen Bass had passed the minimum wage increase without a vote. This was false, as the ordinance was enacted after the city council voted 12-3 to enact the law.
- On June 4, at a Ralphs in West Hills, a petition circulator told a witness that the referendum was “to equalize wages,” and that the petition would “help” IHSS workers and EMTs. This communicated that the petition would raise wages for in-home supportive services workers and EMTs, which is false.
- On June 5, at the Ralphs on 9th Street and Hope Street in downtown Los Angeles, a circulator seeking to obtain the signature of a witness stated that she worked for a paid operation and was brought in from out of town. The witness asked what the petition was about. The circulator answered, “It’s for the minimum wage.” The witness asked “What does it do?” The circulator responded by saying, “The City Council passed a law that gives a minimum wage increase, but then lowers it after the Olympics.” Also on June 5, a petition circulator made the same inaccurate statement that the minimum wage would lower after the Olympics to another witness on June 5 at the Courthouse in Downtown Los Angeles.
- On June 4, at a Sprout’s on La Brea, a petition circulator said to passersby that a signature on the petition was to “increase the wage.” Again, this is the precise opposite of the content and effect of the petition.
- On June 5, at a Food for Less on Slauson Avenue, a petition circulator asked a passerby, “Will you sign this petition for rent control?” This was misleading because he was collecting signatures on the referendum petition, which has nothing to do with rent control.
- On June 5, at Royce Quad at UCLA, a petition circulator told a witness who informed him that the referendum would harm workers that "it's not what you think" and that the circulator was actually "with the union." In fact, the referendum is sponsored entirely by businesses and would overturn a minimum wage ordinance championed by unions.
- On June 6, at an Albertsons on Hillhurst Avenue in Los Feliz, a petition circulator asked passersby to sign the petition to “increase wages and benefits for all workers.”

On June 6, at a Bristol Farms on Lincoln Boulevard, a petition circulator told a witness that the living wage ordinance was passed due to City Council corruption and that the City Council had bypassed voters. He also said that the Union would receive \$1.25 out of workers’ hourly wages as a result of the ordinance, a claim that is patently false.

These do not appear to be isolated instances or the acts of rogue circulators, but rather appear to reflect grossly negligent or intentional training by the Alliance and its agents. Multiple

circulators indicated that they had limited knowledge about the petition or that they had been misled themselves about the content of the petition.

Not only are proponents benefitting from having their circulators mislead voters, they appear to be doing so knowingly. For example:

- When a witness explained to the circulator referenced above at 9th Street and Hope Street that the referendum petition would actually remove a minimum wage increase and read her the booklet, the circulator explained that she had been given incorrect information from the Alliance or its agents.
- When a witness explained to the circulator referenced above in West Hills that the petition was actually to repeal the minimum wage for hotel workers, the petition circulator said, “I’m not sure about what it does and all that, I’m just getting paid by the signature. That’s what they told me to say.”
- On June 8, a witness spoke with a petition circulator who said, “you don’t understand, I’m on the right side, I’m trying to raise the wage.” After the witness explained that the petition would actually overturn the minimum wage, she teared up and said “I’m going to cry,” and “They lied to me.”
- On June 10, a circulator at Grand Central Market, who had been recruited from Texas to work on the referendum, introduced the petition by stating she was gathering signatures to increase the wages for airport and hotel workers. When asked about what the company she worked for had told her, she said “they told me it is to raise the minimum wage.” When asked if she would still be gathering signatures for the petition if she were to learn that it would actually overturn an ordinance to raise the minimum wage, she said she would not.

The corrosive effect of proponents’ deception on the integrity of our electoral system is real. For this reason, a coalition of supporters of the Minimum Wage Ordinance have engaged in a campaign to educate voters about the true contents of the petition. A substantial number of voters have undertaken efforts to withdraw their signature from the referendum petition after discovering the true effect of proponents’ referendum.

b. Tampering with Petitions

California law and the Election Code of the City of Los Angeles both require that each registered voter must sign the petition themselves, and personally affix certain personal information. *See* Cal. Elec. Code §100(b); L.A. Elec. Code § 700(d). We do not believe this rule has been consistently followed by referendum petition circulators. A witness filmed a petition circulator outside of a Food 4 Less in South Los Angeles boasting, “I can write whatever I want on the paper . . . I can put the date on it,” as he indicated he was going to fill in the missing date on an incomplete signature.

c. Failure to Display Required Notice of Top Funders

California law requires political committees circulating referendum petitions to comply with certain donor disclosures. Specifically, when a referendum petition does not contain the required disclosure on the face of the petition, Elections Code section 107 requires circulators to carry a “top funders sheet” along with the petition. Intentionally misrepresenting or intentionally making a false statement “concerning the contents, purport or effect of the . . . petition’s Official Top Funders disclosure. . . to any person who signs, or who desires to sign, or who is requested to sign, or who makes inquiries with reference to it, or to whom it is presented for the person’s signature” is a misdemeanor pursuant to Section 18600. Observers have witnessed numerous violations of these requirements, including:

- On June 3 at a Ralph’s in Woodland Hills, a witness asked a petition circulator who was funding the petition. She incorrectly told him, “The City Council is funding this,” and that “They’re raising wages for all people.” He then asked for her Top Funders sheet, and she said “What’s that?” She did not have a Top Funders sheet.
- On June 3, at the West Hills Plaza, a witness asked a petition circulator if she could see the Top Funders sheet. The petition circulator would not give it to her, and instead walked away while telling her to “go away.”
- On June 3 at a Ralph’s on Pico Boulevard, a witness asked a petition circulator to see their Top Funders sheet. She told him something to the effect of, “Not exactly sure who is funding it, maybe the City Council. There is no Top Funders sheet.” She gave the petition to the witness who looked it over and confirmed that there was no Top Funders sheet.
- On June 4, at a Food for Less on Slauson Avenue, a witness asked a petition circulator for the Top Funders sheet. The petition circulator did not have it.
- On June 6, at a Bristol Farms on Lincoln Boulevard, a witness asked the petition circulator who was funding the petition, and whether he had a Top Funders sheet. The petition circulator looked for it in his papers and in his car, but he did not have it and did not know who the funders were.
- On June 6, at a Ralph’s on Hollywood Boulevard, a witness asked a petition circulator for their Top Funders sheet, who said she did not have it.

As of the date of this letter, we have received twenty-eight reports from witnesses stating that they interacted with a referendum petition circulator who did not have a top funder sheet. Given that this referendum involves major corporations seeking to overturn a minimum wage law for their or their contractors’ employees, disclosure of the identities of the petition’s major funders is especially relevant and the failure to display the legally required Top Funders sheet is especially concerning.

d. Violence and Threats by Referendum Petition Circulators

Committing assault, committing battery, and willfully threatening to commit a crime that will result in great bodily injury are all crimes under California law. California Penal Code §§ 240, 242, and 422. Unfortunately, petition circulators have engaged in widespread acts and threats violence of violence across Los Angeles. For example:

- On June 4, at a Wal-Mart in Porter Ranch, a referendum petition circulator violently assaulted a witness, bumping his chest into his chest, then punching him in the face, grabbing his wrist, and shoving him backward so that his shoulder slammed into a water truck parked in front of the building. The circulator then repeatedly touched and shoved the witness, taunting him while the witness recorded a video.
- On June 3, a petition circulator at Vons in Mission Hills told a witness to “get the fuck away,” and then threatened her by yelling, “You’re going to get punched,” and “Somebody is going to punch you.”
- On June 4, a witness recorded a video of a hostile and aggressive petition circulator at an Albertsons in Northridge, he physically intimidated her, grabbed her, and moved toward her saying that he was going to grab her cell phone as she was recording, causing her to suffer an anxiety attack.
- On June 4, a petition circulator repeatedly used his body to make contact with a witness’s body to prevent the witness from walking through a parking lot at a Super King in Northridge.
- On June 4, at a Ralphs in Chatsworth, a petition circulator shoved her clipboard into a witness and also threw water from her dog’s bowl at him, drenching his back and clipboard.
- On June 4, at a Ralphs near USC, a petition circulator shoved a witness first lightly and then forcefully backward, after saying, “We can have this out right now, you’re scared, you don’t know who you’re messing with, I’ll lay you out right here I don’t care about no police”
- On June 8, a petition circulator was filmed threatening a witness, saying, “You really want me to punch the fuck out of you I’m a beat your ass and take your camera and flip your camera and beat your ass with your camera.”
- On June 9, at a Vons on Sunset Boulevard, a petition circulator told a witness “the boys are going to kick your ass,” called two men who showed up ten minutes later, surrounded the witness, and shoved him. Then the circulator punched the witness in the face, making contact with his chin. She also repeatedly called him the N-word and “faggot,” making this attack a possible hate crime.

We encourage your offices to fully investigate these concerns and take all appropriate legal action. We will be glad to assist in this process. We will provide your offices with supporting information, including details regarding the names and contact information of witnesses, sworn declarations, and videographic evidence. Please contact us so that we can arrange to provide this evidence. We can be reached by email at ztucker@unitehere11.org and jpalmer@unitehere11.org.

Sincerely,

/s/

Zoe Tucker
Counsel for UNITE HERE Local 11

Jordan Palmer
Counsel for UNITE HERE Local 11

cc: Members of Los Angeles City Council
City Clerk of the City of Los Angeles