

REPORT OF LOS ANGELES TRUTH COMMISSION ON LABOR ABUSES AT FLYING FOOD GROUP (LAX)

MAY 2026

COMMISSIONERS

Yvonne Wheeler

President of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor

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General Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Firefighters

Reverend William Smart Jr.

President and CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Chloe Osmer

Executive Director of the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund

Kevin Riley

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*Participating in individual capacity; title for identification purposes only.

STATEMENT FROM COMMISSION CHAIR

I want to thank the workers for their extraordinary courage in coming forward to share their experiences. Too often, women endure sexual harassment in silence, and far too many workers live in fear of retaliation for speaking out against injustice. I have witnessed firsthand the resilience of these workers and their unwavering commitment to dignity, respect, and justice. Their bravery makes clear that Flying Food Group has shown a blatant disregard for the very people whose labor keeps this company running, and the City can no longer stand by and tolerate these abuses.

What is happening at Flying Food Group is not a series of isolated incidents. It is a deeply rooted pattern of worker mistreatment and neglect. After hearing directly from employees, I am appalled by reports of unsafe and unhealthy working conditions that put workers' lives at risk every single day. From serious fire safety violations to ongoing physical hazards across kitchen, transportation, and warehouse operations, workers are being forced to choose between earning a paycheck and protecting their own safety. No worker should ever have to report to a job where they fear being trapped in a cooler during a fire or losing access to basic healthcare without warning.

Companies like Flying Food Group should not be allowed to retain licenses to operate at LAX while demonstrating such reckless disregard for the law, for their workers, and for the City of Los Angeles. As President of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, the testimony I heard today makes it abundantly clear that the City must act immediately to hold Flying Food Group accountable.

Yvonne Wheeler

President of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor

This report was prepared with the support of UNITE HERE Local 11, which represents the workers at Flying Food Group's LAX facility. For more information, see About This Report section.

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

On April 13, 2026, workers and their representatives at the airline-catering company Flying Food Group gathered to bear witness to the conditions at the Company's LAX-serving facility. The forum brought together a panel of six prominent individuals with deep experience in matters of labor protections and social justice to receive their testimony and evidence. This report outlines the testimony and other evidence received by the Commission.

- The Commission was comprised of the following distinguished community leaders:
 - Yvonne Wheeler, President of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor
 - Frank Lima, General Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Firefighters
 - Reverend William Smart Jr., President and CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
 - Chloe Osmer, Executive Director of the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund
 - Kevin Riley, Director of UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (participated in his individual; title for identification purposes only)

During and leading up to the April 13, 2026 hearing, the Commission was presented with substantial evidence concerning labor practices at Flying Food Group. This body of evidence included the following:

- Testimony from fifteen Flying Food Group workers, who shared their experiences working at the LAX facility on a variety of topics, including workplace safety, wage theft, sexual harassment, and freedom of association.
- Testimony from attorneys and organizers regarding their experiences representing the workers at Flying Food Group on various matters.
- A presentation by Lance Compa—a widely renowned scholar with deep expertise on international labor standards and human rights—on the findings of an independent report he co-authored with former ILO Deputy Director-General Deborah Greenfield, concerning Flying Food Group's labor practices under international human rights and labor rights standards.
- Videos, photographs, and documentation concerning worker complaints lodged against Flying Food Group and citations and complaints issued against the Company by government agencies.

This testimony and other evidence received by the Commission are deeply troubling. As described in this report, which was prepared with the support of UNITE HERE Local 11, these practices fall in the following areas:

- **Health and Safety:** Practices that imperil the safety of workers and the public in a range of areas, with particular concern around fire safety. Of note, during a fire at the facility on January 22, 2026—the second in four months—after all other line workers were evacuated, two workers were found inside a cooler whose entrance door had been locked from the outside. The workers had been banging on the door to get out. The Flying Food Group had previously been cited for failing to ensure that refrigerated rooms could be opened from the inside, among multiple other affirmed Cal/OSHA citations. It has also been cited for public safety violations, including directing drivers without proper licenses to operate large trucks.
- **Wage Theft:** Failure to pay workers the minimum hourly wage required for airport employers and failure to comply with a post-Covid return-to-work law, as reflected by citations from the Los Angeles Bureau of Contract Administration and California Labor Commissioner. As a result of worker complaints, over the last

several years, the Flying Food Group has paid workers more than a \$1 million and over the last decade over \$5 million in owed compensation to workers.

- **Sexual Harassment:** Complaints have been filed by seven women workers alleging that they experienced sexual harassment in pending civil rights complaints.
- **Retaliation and Labor Violations:** Instances of retaliation against workers who speak out about abuses or organize. Complaints have been filed alleging retaliation for speaking out regarding sexual harassment (including three of the women who came forward), workplace safety, and violations of state employment law. In addition, Flying Food Group has admitted to interrogating workers and illegally supporting an effort to eliminate the union, with additional complaints still pending.
- **International Human Rights and Labor Standards:** Conduct that appears to violate minimum standards set by the United Nations' International Labour Organization and other international standards.

This report summarizes testimony and other evidence received in each area and concludes with some observations and recommendations for airlines and City leaders.

OVERVIEW OF THE AIRLINE CATERING INDUSTRY AND FLYING FOOD GROUP

Airline catering is a critical component of the larger air travel and hospitality sector whose workers have often gone overlooked. To provide context for the discussion that follows, this section reviews background information presented by UNITE HERE Local 11 on the industry at large and the Union’s ongoing difficulties at Flying Food Group.

Airline catering is a multibillion-dollar industry. At LAX alone, hundreds of international flights depart daily for destinations around the world, carrying individually wrapped meals for travelers flying first-class to economy alike. Passengers pay hundreds, thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands of dollars for the tickets that include these meals. The workers who produce them work in industrial food factories that operate around the clock on the outskirts of airports.

These workers cook vast quantities of food. They assemble these meals in a cold kitchen; load and drive the meals in commercial trucks onto the tarmac to the planes; unload carts of meals onto the plane; and return dirty dishes from incoming flights to the factory’s steamy dishroom of giant industrial dishwashers. Workers produce flight after flight of meals, making sure quantities are correct, special meals are accounted for, and temperatures are safe. This back-breaking work is almost entirely invisible to airline passengers.

Historically, airline-catering workers were employed directly by the airlines, but beginning in the 1980s airlines began outsourcing these jobs to contractors that competed for the airlines’ business largely on the basis of labor costs. This same dynamic played out a century ago, bringing us the original garment industry sweatshops in early 20th century New York City, before those garment factories moved to the Southern United States and then overseas for even cheaper labor. Today, a similar paradigm has emerged in the airline catering industry in Los Angeles and across the country—except these food production factories cannot move too far from airport tarmacs.

In North America, five major companies dominate the airline catering industry: LSG Sky Chefs, Gate Gourmet, Do & Co, D’Nata, and Flying Food Group. These companies aggressively compete with each other for business with the airlines, while other smaller players like NewRest and SkyCafe constantly try to grow market share by luring airlines away from them. This fierce competition is based on companies marketing a better “sweet spot” of innovative food selections and cheaper costs to the airlines. And much like the garment industry sweatshops of the last century, it is a race to the bottom, where the airlines reward the companies with the lowest wage and benefit costs and the least union representation.

What does this economic dynamic look like inside the workplace? In airline catering, food production is governed by one overriding principle: the meals must make it to the flight on time. If the meals are late, then the flight becomes late—and the airline catering company will be fined thousands of dollars by the client-airline. This breakneck production schedule paired with the lack of public attention inside these industrial kitchens creates a pressure-cooker environment at airline catering companies like Flying Food Group. The result is disturbing but not surprising: dangerous, unhealthy, and unsafe work conditions.

In 2015, workers at Flying Food Group in Los Angeles successfully organized and fought to win representation through a union—UNITE HERE Local 11—to address their daily working conditions collectively. In 2016, Flying Food Group workers at the Inglewood facility won their first union contract, and in 2019 renegotiated that contract, winning free family health insurance for the first time for airline catering workers anywhere in the county. It was an optimistic period for Flying Food Group workers.

Then the world changed. When the pandemic hit in 2020 the entire airline catering industry effectively shut down. Companies in airline-related industries like catering received federal money from the CARES Act Payroll Support

Program (PSP) to keep workers on payroll instead of laying them off. Notably, however, Flying Food Group—which received \$85 million dollars of PSP money—used a loophole in the program to first layoff thousands of workers across the country, and then use the money to, in the words of CEO David Cotton “keep our facilities open with reduced staffing levels.”

Today, Flying Food Group has fully recovered from the pandemic and is thriving. The Company’s gross receipts at its LAX facility alone as reported to the Los Angeles World Airports has grown from \$43 million in 2022 to over \$112 million in 2025. The Company now counts among its airline clients Qantas, Singapore Air, Japan Airlines, ANA, Lufthansa, Swiss Air, Austrian Air, Air France, Starlux, China Southern and more.

In 2022, workers at Flying Food Group began contract negotiations with the Company for their third contract. According to Local 11, it became clear after several months of negotiations that the Company’s attitude toward workers had shifted for the worse: They were unresponsive to economic demands; unilaterally withdrew from the union’s health care plan and replaced it with coverage that many workers find to be inferior, less accessible and more costly; and dismissed most non-economic demands.

Moreover, as reviewed below, Flying Food Group has been found to have violated worker protection, wage, and public safety laws by five different government agencies. These include numerous violations of workplace safety laws, public safety laws, minimum wage laws, state employment laws around recall after the pandemic, and labor laws.

WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Commission learned from workers and their representatives that Flying Food Group has been the subject of several complaints, investigations, and citations regarding its workplace health and safety conditions. Six workers shared stories regarding hazardous conditions.

FFG'S RECORD OF CAL/OSHA COMPLAINTS AND CITATIONS

Over the last three years, workers and their representatives at Flying Food Group have filed five Cal/OSHA complaints against the Company.

- **February 6th, 2023:** Workers alleged that FFG bolted shut a dispatch/exit door on the day of a worker picket line. As discussed below, this incident triggered an investigation by Cal/OSHA which resulted in citations for 6 violations—including for the obstructed door—which were later affirmed with some modifications in a Settlement Order. The Company's bolting shut of the exit door also resulted in enforcement action by the National Labor Relations Board.
- **February 29th, 2024:** An employee filed a retaliation and unsafe workplace conditions complaint with Cal/OSHA. This worker had suffered chemical burns due to insufficient protective equipment at Flying Food Group and was then terminated after making health and safety claims against the Company. A separate arbitral proceeding found that this employee had been unjustly terminated.
- **November 25th, 2025** (amended December 2025): Workers and lawyers from UNITE HERE Local 11 filed a complaint with Cal/OSHA detailing seven new allegations against Flying Food Group, covering broad areas of potential violations of workers' rights, health, and safety, which are currently under investigation. Some of the allegations in this complaint are included below as part of the review of the Kitchen, Transportation, and Warehouse units.
- **January 23rd, 2026:** Workers and the Union filed a complaint after a fire broke out at FFG's Inglewood facility on January 22nd, the second in four months. This fire broke out inside of the walls of the facility near the Hot Kitchen, near gas lines and other pipes, and consumed an industrial oven. Employees were evacuated from the building, and several firetrucks arrived to secure the facility.
- **January 30th, 2026:** During the investigation of the January 22nd fire, the Union discovered that, after all other line workers were evacuated, two workers were found inside a cooler whose entrance door had been locked from the outside. The workers had been banging on the door to get out. Cal/OSHA had previously cited FFG in 2023 for failing to ensure that walk-in freezers could be opened from the inside. Local 11 filed a supplemental Cal/OSHA complaint for this incident.

As mentioned above, in August 2023, Flying Food Group was cited by Cal/OSHA for six violations of workplace safety law. These citations related to FFG locking an exit door from the outside on a day of a planned worker picket line; failing to ensure cooler rooms open from inside; inadequate forklift training; a malfunctioning dishwasher sensor; fire extinguisher inspections; and eyewash equipment. In February 2026, after fighting the citations for more than two years, FFG agreed to a Settlement Order affirming the citations, with some modifications, and paying fines on them.

The four additional Cal/OSHA complaints remain pending investigation. Cal/OSHA investigators have visited the facility several times for each of the three complaints from late 2025 and early 2026 and interviewed several workers, who have corroborated the facts included herein. The two most recent complaints concern the fire that took place on January 22nd of this year, as discussed in the following section.

FIRE SAFETY

The January 22 fire, which broke out in the Hot Kitchen, raised serious safety concerns. Among these was a chaotic and disorganized evacuation, which one worker described in her testimony (translated from Spanish):

Many of my colleagues and I ran out of the kitchen. Personally, I didn't know where my nearest emergency exit was. Thanks to a cook who shouted at me to go through that door, I was able to get out in time...More than anything, we are here to talk not just about the fire, but about the lack of safety and the lack of training we have. We never had a drill that I saw until we started raising our voices.

So, we went outside. We were in the yard for many minutes. We weren't told what was actually happening. They only gave us the instruction to go back to work after an hour and a half. Many of my colleagues and I returned—I was one of the first to go back—and we realized there was a lot of smoke. We spoke with the head of security to tell him we couldn't go back...

[H]onestly, we are all afraid. Everyone. I don't think there was a single person working there who didn't wonder what had happened or who wasn't afraid.

Most concerning, the Commission learned that, during the fire, two workers were locked in a cooler room within a chain had been used to secure its entrance door from the outside. The workers remained in the cooler room after 300 other workers had evacuated, and — having heard the fire alarm — were banging on the cooler door for someone to release them. One of the workers described the harrowing experience in a statement:

[W]e were inside the cooler room cutting bread when, after a little while, a fire alarm began to sound. . . So, we went to the door we had used to come in order to get out. We both pushed on the door, but we found it would not open. We could not open the door...

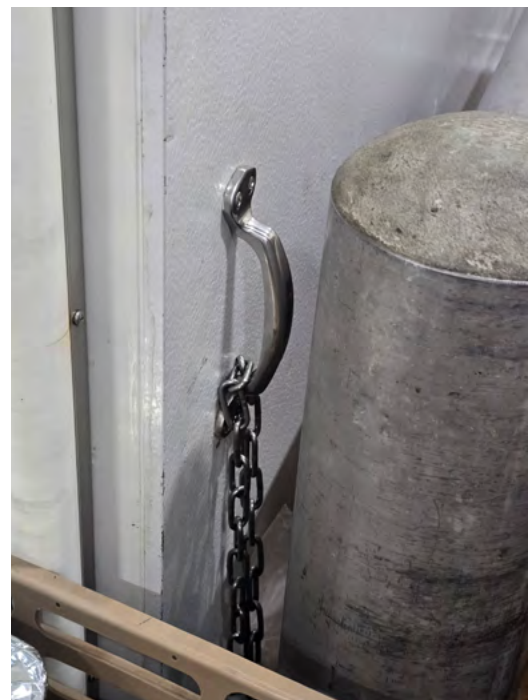
We banged on the door with our hands and yelled to try to get someone's attention. But no one came. We just kept banging. We banged on the door for what I think was 10 to 15 minutes. Finally, a supervisor [] heard the noise we were making with our banging. He opened the door and let us out.

The exit door had been locked from the outside. The chain had been put on the door so it would not open from the inside. That is why we couldn't open the door.

During my time at Flying Food Group, I do not recall having ever been trained on safety related working in the cooler room, or about fire safety or emergency evacuation training more generally. The facility is often crowded with racks and boxes that make it difficult to get around.

I have since learned that there was another door in the cooler room, that leads to another cooler room. But at the time, we did not know that. I am not a tall person, and there were a lot of tall racks and food products in the cooler room, which were apparently blocking the door, so we didn't see it.

Realizing how much danger [we] were in during the fire has caused me a lot of stress. I have had nightmares about being trapped in a fire.



Chain on outside of cooler room door

In her testimony before the Commission, the worker described her terror after finally being released from the cooler room and realizing the extent and impact of the fire's blaze on the kitchen. She commented: "If it had been an explosion, I wouldn't be telling you this, and I ask from the bottom of my heart that you please, there are many of us who work, ladies and gentlemen who are already of retirement age."

The Commission was presented with a photograph showing the chain on the outside of the cooler room door taken several days after the fire. That photograph is reproduced on the previous page.

The episode was all the more troubling because, as mentioned above, Cal/OSHA had previously cited the Company for this exact hazard. The August 2023 citation specifically noted that FFG had failed to ensure that freezer doors could "open properly from the inside by the employees." This citation was affirmed in the February 2026 Settlement Order. Yet the Company evidently did not correct the hazard.

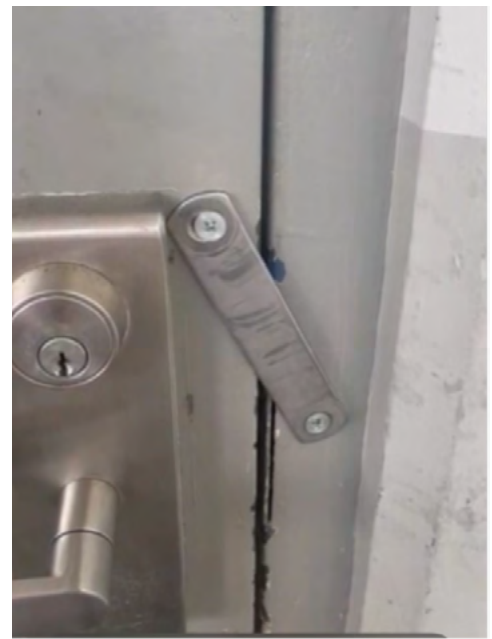
The Commission was also presented with evidence concerning a disturbingly similar incident in February 2023 in which FFG bolted shut a facility exit door from the outside on the day of a planned worker picket line. The Commission was presented with a remarkable video in which workers and a manager discovered in real time that the exit door would not open from the inside. As the video shows, after trying repeatedly to open the door, the manager and workers walked through the facility to find another exit through which they could leave to find that the door had been bolted shut with a metal bracket from the outside. Two screenshots from the video—one depicting the door from the inside and the other showing it bolted shut from the outside—are reproduced below:

The Commission also heard two first-hand accounts of the incident. The first was from a worker who saw the dispatch door bolted shut on the morning of the planned picket line and who later found it would not open. The second was from a Union representative who recorded the video and could be heard at its end stating that she would now be calling the Fire Marshall.

The Company's action resulted in enforcement by Cal/OSHA as part of its 2023 citation, which was affirmed with modifications February 2026. In addition, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) issued a complaint against FFG, resulting in the Company pledging in a March 2026 Settlement Agreement that "WE WILL NOT obstruct our doors to discourage you from participating in protected activities."

The grave seriousness of these incidents are obvious. Emphasizing these concerns, one of the Commissioners, Frank Lima, General Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Firefighters and a captain in the Los Angeles Fire Department, remarked that he was reminded of two incidents where he was called to the site of horrific incidents where many Angelinos died because building exits (in those cases, to the roof) had been chained shut.

Another of the Commissioners, Kevin Riley, Director of the UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health



Screenshot from video of workers learning exit door was bolted shot from the outside on day of planned protes

Program (participating in his personal capacity), drew parallels between the safety hazards created by FFG and the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 in New York City. In that tragedy, locked factory doors trapped workers inside, resulting in the deaths of 146 immigrant women who lost their lives either by suffocating on smoke or leaping from upper floor windows in a desperate attempt to escape.

SAFETY HAZARDS IN THE WAREHOUSE

The Commission received testimony and documentation showing safety hazards in FFG’s warehouse. These include obstructed emergency exits; blocked fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems; and massive pallets with food production materials stacked to the ceiling. A worker with over ten years of experience reported having to climb racks due to broken forklifts, and that the warehouse is often severely understaffed and overcrowded with products. As he put it (translated from Spanish):

The Company isn’t interested in worker safety. There are ten of us working there every day under terrible conditions. We even have to use [manual] labor to pull the boxes from the highest level of the racks [because the forklifts are broken down]. We’ve had problems with this. We’ve told them the warehouse needs attention... They are blocking the entrances and exits. There are too many high pallets on the third level, covering the sprinklers and all that. We have told them on several occasions, and they don’t take action. Every day, the Company is getting more business. New airlines are arriving, and they are putting them in the same place. It’s overcrowding because, as I repeat, all the hallways are closed. In the event of an emergency, we are going to have trouble getting out.



Pallets and boxes blocking access to fire extinguisher and exit

TRUCK SAFETY AND OTHER HAZARDS

Finally, the Commission was presented with evidence of safety hazards related to FFG’s use of heavy vehicles and in several other areas. The Commission reviewed one video from 2015 showing a truck driver pressing the horn button on a truck steering wheel, but the horn produced no sound.

Especially after the fatal LaGuardia Airport tarmac collision between a plane and a vehicle, the danger of such a hazard on an airport tarmac is self-evident. The same video also showed that the truck had a non-functional driver-side seatbelt. The Commission was also presented with photographs and information showing malfunctioning hydraulic lifts; broken loading steps; and a damaged or broken sideview mirror and taillight.



Screenshot of video of nonfunctioning truck horn



Broken loading steps on truck



Broken truck taillight



Missing sideview mirror

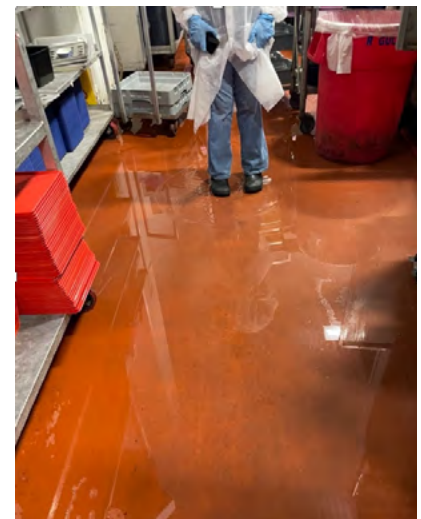
Additionally, the Commission learned that, in May 2023, the California Highway Patrol, which enforces safety regulations for vehicles, found more than seven violations at FFG’s facility related to its vehicle safety, including:

- Employing and authorizing seven drivers who did not possess a valid license to drive trucks in excess of 26,000 pounds
- Failure to maintain driver proficiency records for twenty-four drivers
- Failure to maintain proper vehicle service and maintenance logs
- Failure to periodically inspect vehicles
- Failure to accurately report the condition of company vehicles

The Commission also heard about workers regularly injuring themselves in slip and falls. It was reported that the dish room, kitchen, and sections of the broader food production space are frequently inundated with water and do not drain properly.

Additionally, at least one worker has suffered chemical burns on her hands, reportedly because the kitchen had a shortage of protective gear. As discussed further below, this worker was terminated in February 2024, just five days after lodging a safety complaint with the company about her injury. She has filed a pending retaliation complaint with state authorities. A neutral arbitrator has since found she was terminated without just cause.

As her case illustrates, the Commission learned that workers at Flying Food Group have not been silent in the face of these conditions. As the workers and their representatives explained, they have come forward, documented their experiences, and sought help through available channels. The Commission also learned that the safety issues have been thoroughly documented and presented to the City several times, including to the Mayor, the City Attorney, and others.



Floor with large quantity of water



Chemical burn on worker’s hand

REFLECTIONS FROM COMMISSIONER FRANK LIMA

General Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Firefighters

Thank you for inviting me to your meeting on April 11, 2026. I was moved by your incredibly powerful stories about the conditions your airline catering workers face.

The only way to combat on the job abuses like this is to do exactly what you are doing — bring it to the public. People need to know about the exploitation that is happening to our sisters and brothers.

As a labor leader, these stories are devastating as they strip the dignity of work from people just trying to make a living, but as a person who cares about other people, I am horrified to know that this is how already exploited workers are being even further taken advantage of.

There is no doubt that more work needs to be done to continue telling these stories so that meaningful and substantive change can be made. On behalf of 365,000 fire fighters across the United States and Canada, we stand in solidarity with you, UNITE HERE Local 11, and your cause to make these abhorrent working conditions better and more acceptable so that every worker is safe and valued on the job.

REFLECTIONS FROM COMMISSIONER KEVIN RILEY

Workplace Safety Expert

Your testimonies this morning took me back over a century — to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City in 1911. Those garment workers had been warning about unsafe conditions for years. When the fire broke out, they found the doors and exits locked. Nearly 150 workers died — most of them young immigrant women, burned alive or forced to jump from upper-story windows.

Out of that tragedy came action. Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union fought for the first real labor protections in this country. Emergency exits. Fire extinguishers. Sprinkler systems. Safe machinery. Protections that today many of us simply take for granted.

Hearing your stories reminds us that the fight is not over. What I see in this room are workers demanding what the law already guarantees them and striving to hold an employer accountable to their legal responsibilities. You are sounding an important alarm — so that we don't end up with our own Triangle Shirtwaist disaster. I applaud your courage in speaking out, and I stand with you in your efforts

WAGE THEFT

The Commission received extensive evidence concerning wage theft at FFG's LAX facility.

A prominent worker rights attorney, Lauren Teukolsky, who represented FFG workers in a wage theft class action lawsuit, reviewed the Company's history of violations of the City of Los Angeles's Living Wage Ordinance ("LWO"). During the course of Flying Food Group's current license with Los Angeles World Airports ("LAWA"), the Bureau of Contract Administration ("BCA"), which enforces the City of Los Angeles's Living Wage Ordinance ("LWO"), issued at least six notices finding Flying Food Group and its subcontractors in violation of the LWO.

- On August 4, 2022 and October 18, 2022, the BCA issued citations (called "Notices to Correct") to Flying Food Group, finding the Company had violated the LWO.
- On March 14, 2023, BCA issued citations to two of FFG's subcontractors, People Ready and Select Staffing, finding that they violated the LWO in connection with work performed at the Flying Food Group facility. On May 30, 2023, BCA issued a citation to another Flying Food Group subcontractor, Fairway Staffing, finding that it violated the LWO in connection with work performed at the Flying Food Group facility.
- On June 20, 2023, BCA issued a citation to another Flying Food Group subcontractor, G2 Security, finding that it violated the LWO in connection with work performed at the Flying Food Group facility.
- On October 19, 2023, BCA issued another citation to Flying Food Group, finding the Company had violated the LWO.

Additionally, in the Fall of 2023, workers filed a class action lawsuit against Flying Food Group alleging violations of their right to be paid in accordance with the LWO and the right to be paid for missed meal periods in a case captioned *Maria Torres v. Flying Food Group*, Case No. 23STCV23422. Ms. Teukolsky and attorneys from Local 11 represented the workers. The Company later agreed to pay more than a half a million dollars to settle the case.

These are only the most recent instances of wage theft at FFG. Indeed, Flying Food Group's history of violating the Living Wage Ordinance stretches back over a decade. BCA first cited FFG on May 13, 2015, stating in a Notice to Correct that the Company had been underpaying workers for the prior five years: "According to our records, there are 271 employees who have not been paid the correct Living Wage rates since May 1, 2010, nor are presently being paid the correct Living Wage rate." In 2017, FFG settled a separate class action wage theft lawsuit covering 1,000 workers for \$4,150,000.

As Ms. Teukolsky explained, in the earlier case and in 2023, the Company took the position that the majority of its workers were not subject to the City's Living Wage Ordinance. In the most recent settlement, Flying Food Group agreed that it would cease to assert that the Living Wage Ordinance did not apply to its workers.

Moreover, as the Commission learned, FFG has violated other wage-related employment laws as well, including those at the state level. On August 4, 2023, the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement ("DLSE") issued a citation to FFG after determining that the Company failed to properly recall workers to their former positions, in violation of state law SB 93. Signed into law in 2021, SB 93 requires hotels, event centers, and other hospitality businesses to offer employees laid off due to the COVID-19 downturn in tourism an opportunity to return to work in open positions for which they are qualified in order of seniority. As a result of the citation, FFG paid affected workers a total of \$675,000.00.

Reflecting on Flying Food Group's track record at LAX, Ms. Teukolsky observed:

In my 25 years of representing workers in wage theft cases, Flying Food really stands out for the persistence of its non-compliance, continuing to shortchange, nickel and dime its workers, even in the

face of repeated government citations, two class action settlements, and a state enforcement action, totaling nearly \$5 million in payouts.

Moreover, the Commission heard testimony that, even when FFG has not violated the law, it has paid workers wages that are at or close to the lowest wage it is legally permitted to pay workers — wages below what workers report they need to live with dignity in our high-cost region. An FFG worker movingly spoke about the parallels between the poverty she experienced in El Salvador and the desperation she has felt at Flying Food Group (translated from Spanish):

I am a single mother of five. Nine years ago, I made the heartbreaking decision to leave El Salvador to escape extreme poverty—times when my children and I had only tortillas with salt to eat. I brought two of my daughters with me, but three of my children remained behind.

I work hard for them. My youngest son, who is still in El Salvador, was born with a brain injury and lives with a disability. I am solely responsible for his care and his future. Because of the low wages at FFG, I am forced to live in a single room with strangers just so I can send enough money home for his medical needs.

My dream is simple: to afford a modest apartment where I can finally reunite with my son here in the United States. FFG is taking that dream away from me. While our Union, UNITE HERE Local 11, fights for a living wage, FFG continues to keep us at the bare minimum. We are facing a company that refuses to listen to the workers and makes unilateral changes that hurt families like mine... I urge all of you to hold Flying Food Group accountable. Please stop the wage theft and start respecting the workers.

REFLECTIONS FROM COMMISSIONER CHLOE OSMER

Executive Director of the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund

During the Truth Commission, my fellow Commission members and I heard from workers at Flying Food Group about the devastating impact of wage theft on their lives. Workers shared about repeated violations by Flying Food Group of the Living Wage Ordinance in LA. The theft of their wages by Flying Food Group forced workers to have to make choices between buying eggs and milk or paying rent. It forced them to do one of the most painful things a parent can do, delay being reunited with their children, because they couldn't support them financially.

... Flying Food Group's contract with LAWA expires on June 30, 2026. It would be unconscionable for a public agency to continue its contractual relationship with a company that violates the law blatantly and repeatedly. LAWA risks further implicating itself in endangering the lives of hundreds of workers and should act immediately.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The Commission also learned of long-running issues of sexual harassment at Flying Food Group involving seven current and former FFG employees — the “Silence Breakers” — jointly represented by the UC Irvine Workers and Tenants Law and Organizing Clinic (WTLOC) and staff attorneys for UNITE HERE Local 11.

On November 14, 2024, two employees of Flying Food Group filed charges with the California Civil Rights Department (CRD) alleging that the Company failed to protect them from unwanted sexual harassment and discrimination on the job. The charges alleged that workers faced unwanted sexual advances from a Flying Food Group supervisor over an extended period of time, which has caused them to feel anxious or unsafe at work. These initial charges inspired more women to come forward with their own stories of sexual harassment in the months following the original charges. To date, seven women have filed charges with the CRD for this pattern of unlawful conduct.

At least some of the Silence Breakers allege that at least one senior manager of Flying Food was made aware of certain misconduct allegations against the supervisor, but that the Company failed to take action in response. Seven months after the first CRD complaint was filed, Flying Food Group finally terminated the supervisor whom the workers reported had harassed them.

The Commission heard directly from the first worker-victim to file a claim of sexual harassment. She shared her story with the Commission (translated from Spanish):

The supervisor harassed me relentlessly. The harassment began when I was working at FFG through a staffing agency; consequently, I felt I couldn't say anything. It was only when I finally became a direct employee of the Company that I found the courage to speak up, because I knew I had greater protections.

I didn't feel safe; I was terrified. I was so afraid that I wanted to quit my job. I ended up in the hospital due to the stress. I couldn't sleep because my mind was consumed by the thought of having to endure all of that.

As a 57-year-old single mother, I am a fighter, and I have stayed at Flying Food because I am determined to provide a better future for my four children. I do not believe the Company has done enough to take this matter seriously.

RETALIATION AND LABOR VIOLATIONS

In response to the conditions described above, workers at Flying Food Group have organized and spoken out to stop labor violations and improve conditions. However, the Commission heard testimony that FFG has responded to this activism with acts of retaliation.

ALLEGED RETALIATION AGAINST SILENCE BREAKERS

Since filing their original complaints for sexual harassment, three of the seven workers who came forward have filed additional complaints alleging that Flying Food Group has retaliated against them for doing so.

On March 13, 2025, these three whistleblowers participated in a press conference in front of the LAWA office to highlight the problem of sexual harassment at FFG and how it led to the filing of multiple CRD complaints. All three women stood behind the podium, in view of local media, as speakers discussed their allegations. They also have featured prominently alongside other Complainants in social media posts and other public statements from their Union about the harassment allegations.

FFG is aware of the whistleblowers' CRD complaints and knows that they have spoken out publicly about the underlying allegations and issues. The Commission was informed that high-ranking FFG officials, including CEO David Cotton, attended the March 13, 2025 Board of Airport Commissioners meeting where all three women spoke out.

After filing their CRD complaints and speaking out publicly about workplace harassment at the Company, FFG allegedly took multiple adverse employment actions against three Silence Breakers— placing all three at risk of termination. In response, with the assistance of the same joint representation by lawyers at the UC Irvine Workers and Tenants Law and Organizing Clinic and UNITE HERE Local 11, these individuals filed further complaints with the City of Los Angeles alleging unlawful retaliation for filing employment discrimination complaints with the California Civil Rights Department and disclosing facts related to those Complaints to officials from the City of Los Angeles, including LAWA.

During the hearing, Commissioner Yvonne Wheeler, President of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, commended the workers for having the courage to come forward. She remarked:

Thank you for sharing your stories. Thank you for your bravery. Thank you for standing today and sharing your truth. Most women would not share that they've been sexually harassed. Most workers wouldn't do this because of fear of retaliation, which we've see in this company.

LABOR VIOLATIONS

The Commission learned that last year, after a multiyear investigation involving more than twenty witnesses, the prosecutorial arm of the National Labor Relations Board filed a lawsuit against FFG. The multi-complaint suit alleged that FFG had violated workers' rights under the federal National Labor Relations Act in more than a dozen ways. These include threatening, interrogating, surveilling, and retaliating against workers; bolting shut an exit door at its facility on the morning of a planned worker protest, as discussed above; and illegally backing a decertification petition to remove the union entirely from the LAX facility.

On the eve of the trial, just several weeks before the Commission's hearing, Flying Food Group settled the NLRB lawsuit. In a highly unusual step, as part of the settlement, after years of denying that it had violated the law, Flying Food Group admitted to having solicited signatures for a petition to remove the Union; questioning and interrogating employees about their union sympathies and whether they supported the decertification petition; knowingly permitting the circulation of decertification petitions during working hours; and having provided "more than ministerial assistance" to the effort to oust the Union. This conduct occurred during or in the aftermath of a February 2023 worker strike for better wages and conditions.

One worker spoke to the Commission on her experiences during the Company’s illegal efforts to decertify the union. Her story is reproduced below (translated from Spanish):

In 2023, during the strike, I did not go on strike. I was afraid of losing my job, which I had just gotten back. The Company had sent us letters saying that anyone who went on strike could leave, and there was no guarantee they would return to their job once the strike ended.

While I stayed working inside, a woman was collecting signatures to remove the union. I didn’t know her, nor was it my intention to sign anything like that. I am grateful to the union because, thanks to their intervention, I got my job back.

But my supervisor approached me inside the work area and told me that the woman was collecting signatures to get rid of the union, and asked if I wanted to sign. I felt pressured; I felt that if I didn’t do it, there would be reprisals against me. So that day, I said yes and I signed, right there in the area where I was working. I felt bad, but I felt I had to sign.

The Company was also required to provide restitution to union activist and former employee Rafael Leon who had been terminated after helping lead the strike of 2023. As part of a make-whole remedy, FFG was required to pay Mr. Leon \$50,000 in backpay and other compensation and remove references to his suspension or discharge. Finally, FFG was required to publicly post “Notice to Employees” signed by CEO David Cotton pledging not to commit more than a dozen discrete sorts of violations of workers rights going forward.

Beyond those charges resolved in the recent NLRB settlement, the Company has other Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges still pending against it. Most notably, as reported at the hearing, in September 2025, Flying Food Group unilaterally removed workers’ access to their bargained-for health insurance plan. This union-sponsored healthcare plan has long provided high-quality care with low deductibles FFG workers, along with many thousands of other workers in the hospitality sector in Los Angeles.

Despite federal labor law’s clear prohibition on making unilateral changes to terms and conditions of employment, on September 8, 2025, FFG ceased to pay for the healthcare fund required by the workers’ collective bargaining agreement and then proceeded to remove workers from the plan’s healthcare coverage. In its place, Flying Food Group has imposed its own healthcare plan, which many workers find to be inferior, less accessible, and more costly. This change has caused turmoil and widespread complaints in the workplace. One worker spoke to the Commission on how the unilateral rescission of the workers’ healthcare plan has harmed her (translated from Spanish):

The Company took away the insurance we had with the union and gave us another insurance, which I haven’t signed anything for; I haven’t enrolled. I tested positive for a bacterium that



Flying Food Group workers protesting for living wages

causes cancer. I have been struggling to get exams done, which I have here, showing that the insurance won't cover them.

I've lost appointments again and again [because of the new insurance]. ... It seems unjust to me; they are playing with our health. When I had the union insurance, I had my checkups and my medications. With this insurance, I went a month without taking my medications. They are playing with our health to do what they want, to take the employees' money. It seems unjust to me.

I need something to be done. I have children; I love my life. If I didn't love my life, I wouldn't be fighting for my health. Thank you.

OTHER ALLEGED RETALIATION

In addition, numerous other workers have filed pending legal complaints alleging they have been retaliated against by FFG for exercising their rights under various state laws. UNITE HERE Local 11 has presented the City of Los Angeles and the Commission with information concerning many such cases, including the following:

- The Company terminated a worker named Lena Weaver who reported chemical burn injuries. An arbitrator found that the Company's justifications for her termination were baseless — one of three similar cases where arbitrators have recently found the Company's terminations of workers to be without just cause. The Labor Commissioner is also investigating Ms. Weaver's case.
- The Company fired a worker named Derrick Jones who actively participated in and promoted a successful complaint against FFG under the State's post-Covid return to work law, under which the Company was required to pay \$675,000.00. The Labor Commissioner is also investigating Mr. Jones' case.
- The Company took cruel action against an 82-year-old woman named Salud Garcia by assigning her graveyard shifts. She had been an outspoken leader in the workplace on safety issues; testified numerous times before the Board of Airport Commissioners and was featured in the LA Times; and had refused pressure from the Company to resign her Lead position in the dish room.

During the hearing, workers shared stories of being fearful of retaliation by the Company. One worker testified that, on the day before and the day of a major worker protest at LAX in November 2025 regarding health and safety conditions at FFG, the Company disciplined workers across her entire department. She understood the disciplines to be aimed at discouraging workers from protesting, stating (translated from Spanish):

I work in the transportation area and on November 24th and 25th I witnessed how my colleagues were intimidated and we received 70 warnings for wanting to access the safety action, and then a colleague of ours was fired. ... The Company gets very aggressive with us and as employees sometimes we are afraid.

Another worker told the Commission: "I try to do my job well, and for the Company to want to discipline me like this—I believe it is because they want to silence me." (Translated from Spanish).

It is well understood that when workers are retaliated against for organizing and blowing the whistle on harmful or inappropriate conduct, such reprisal tends to chill the willingness of other workers to exercise their rights and speak out. As one union witness observed, the fact that workers at Flying Food Group have continued to speak out in the face of FFG's conduct speaks to the seriousness of the issues they are seeking to address.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOR STANDARDS

As its final witness, the Commission heard from labor law expert Lance Compa regarding an independent report he co-authored on Flying Food Group’s labor practices under international human rights and labor standards. Professor Compa is a Senior Lecturer Emeritus at Cornell University. He co-authored the report with Deborah Greenfield, a former Deputy Director-General of the International Labor Organization (“ILO”), the central body of the United Nations that sets international labor standards.

Titled “Lax Standards: Assessing Flying Food Group LLC’s Labor Practices under International Labor Standards,” the report reviews FFG’s conduct at the LAX facility under the standards set by the ILO and other international bodies in the areas of freedom of association, workplace safety, discrimination, and living wages.

As Professor Compa explained, Flying Food Group specifically committed itself to complying with the ILO’s core standards when it joined the United Nations Global Compact in November 2024, where it pledged: “We express our commitment to making the UN Global Compact and its principles part of the strategy, culture and day-to-day operations of our company.” However, Professor Compa remarked in his testimony:

Flying Food has not lived up to that commitment. Under the UN Global Compact, ILO core labor standards require *non-interference* by employers with workers’ freedom of association — the right to organize and the right to collective bargaining.

Instead, Flying Food has repeatedly interfered with employees’ right to freedom of association. For example:

- promoting a decertification move to get rid of the union
- threatening to permanently replace workers if they exercise the right to strike.
- dismissing union leaders, activists, and supporters

and other violations of ILO standards on freedom of association, as described in more detail by previous speakers here, and in our report. ILO labor standards also apply to safety and health, non-discrimination, and living wage requirements.

Based on a painstaking review of materials and worker interviews, the 31-page report details how FFG has violated these standards through its conduct at LAX.

Professor Compa also explained that the airlines that FFG serves — which include many international airlines like Air France, Lufthansa, the Japan Airlines — have a Supplier Code of Conduct requiring subcontractors such as Flying Food to adhere to ILO core labor standards. These airlines are also covered by guidelines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the international body that oversees what are called “due diligence” obligations of global companies to ensure that supply chain subcontractors like Flying Food comply with ILO core labor standards. Some of these airlines are covered by enforceable due diligence legislation exposing them to potential liabilities if they fail to convince Flying Food to adhere to ILO labor standards.

The evidence received by this Commission is fully consistent with these findings. The Commission commends this report to City leaders and to the airlines whose supply chain obligations it directly implicates.

REFLECTION FROM COMMISSIONER WILLIAM SMART JR.

President and CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

It is evident to me that Flying Foods has no regard for its workers. They're pushed to put out the food, but there's no security on their jobs. Something definitely needs to be done about this. They are discriminated against, working around a hazardous environment. Who will speak for them? Who will fight for them? We are the Community must come together and say, "enough is enough."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission convened on April 13, 2026 to receive evidence concerning labor practices at Flying Food Group's LAX facility. This evidence is deeply troubling. It describes a company that has violated multiple workplace safety laws, repeatedly committed wage theft, faces numerous allegations of sexual harassment, and has allegedly retaliated against numerous workers who have had the courage to speak out. Over just the last several years, it has been cited for violations by five different government agencies.

Flying Food Group conducts its business at LAX under a special license granted by the City of Los Angeles. That license carries obligations: fundamentally, licensees must comply fully with applicable law, including meeting basic standards for workplace safety. The evidence before this Commission makes plain that the Company has not honored those basic obligations.

The Commission's most significant concerns go to workplace safety. As detailed above, Cal/OSHA cited the Company in 2023 for failing to ensure that refrigerated rooms could be opened from the inside. That citation was affirmed in a Settlement Order in February 2026. Yet on January 22, 2026—before that order was even final—two workers were locked inside a chained cooler room while a fire raged and more than 300 of their colleagues evacuated, until a supervisor heard them banging on the door and let them out. This was not the Company's first offense of this kind. Three years earlier, it had bolted shut an exit door from the outside on the day of a planned worker picket line, conduct that resulted in enforcement action by both Cal/OSHA and the NLRB. This kind of record demonstrates an extraordinary lack of responsibility and judgment.

The concerns about vehicle safety at the airport are equally serious. Among other violations, the California Highway Patrol documented that the Company authorized drivers without valid commercial licenses to operate heavy trucks on airport grounds. The Commission also reviewed video evidence of a truck with no functioning horn or functional seatbelt. In light of the recent fatal collision at LaGuardia Airport, the danger these conditions pose—to workers, to ground crews, and to the public—requires no elaboration.

Beyond safety, the Company has repeatedly stolen wages from its workers. Over more than a decade, it has been cited multiple times for violations of the City's Living Wage Ordinance and has paid out nearly \$5 million in settlements and enforcement actions—including a \$675,000 state citation for failing to properly recall workers after the pandemic. As one of the attorneys who represented workers in these cases observed, FFG stands out even among companies accused of wage theft for the sheer persistence of its non-compliance. The Commission also received evidence that seven women workers were subjected to alleged sexual harassment by a supervisor whose conduct went unaddressed by the Company for months. More broadly, the Commission received troubling reports of retaliation against workers who filed complaints or had the courage to speak out—conduct that cuts across multiple areas of the record documented in this report.

A company with a record like this has no business operating with the privilege of a special City license. The Commission urges City leaders to hold its licensees to the standards the law requires. The workers at Flying

Food Group have done what the system asks: they have filed complaints with regulators, participated in legal proceedings, and appeared before City bodies. Indeed, they have testified before the Board of Airport Commissioners on no fewer than 45 occasions. The Commission's hope is that this report adds weight to the extensive record that already exists and that City leaders have the will to finally act upon it.

The Commission also notes that airlines have adopted Codes of Conduct committing their contractors to compliance with ILO core labor standards and other human rights requirements. Some operate under due diligence frameworks that create legal accountability for conditions in their supply chains. As the report by Professor Lance Compa and former ILO Deputy Director-General Deborah Greenfield shows, FFG has failed to meet these standards. In view of the information contained herein, the Commission questions how an airline can feel comfortable retaining Flying Food Group as a subcontractor for airline catering services.

Los Angeles is preparing to host the world. The 2026 FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, and the 2028 Summer Olympics will bring millions of visitors through LAX in the years ahead. The workers who prepare their meals, load their flights, and operate the vehicles that serve the tarmac are among those who will make that welcome possible. How this city treats those workers is not a separate question from the kind of city Los Angeles presents itself to be.

The economic success of Flying Food Group—which saw its gross receipts at LAX nearly triple since 2022—has clearly come at the expense of its employees' well-being. The workers who appeared before this Commission asked for workplaces that are safe, wages that are lawful, and the freedom to raise concerns without fear of losing their jobs. These are not extraordinary demands. They are the floor. It is the Commission's view that the City of Los Angeles, and those who do business under its authority, have an obligation to ensure that floor is met.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Truth Commission hearing was organized by UNITE HERE Local 11 on April 13, 2026. Local 11 facilitated the participation of workers and other witnesses during the hearing. Prior to, during, and after the hearing, Local 11 presented additional evidence and records to the Commissioners. Based on this body of evidence, Local 11 prepared a draft of the instant report, which the Commissioners have endorsed. Individual Commissioners also provided additional observations or reflections which are included in the report.

UNITE HERE Local 11 represents over 32,000 workers employed in hotels, restaurants, airports, sports arenas, and convention centers throughout Southern California and Arizona. The union represents the approximately 700 workers at Flying Food Group's LAX facility.

