



WORKER RIGHTS · WASHINGTON

Know Your Rights in Washington

What every hospitality worker should know, in plain language.
No legal jargon.

This guide is general information about Washington employment law as of October 2026. It is not legal advice, and not a substitute for talking to a licensed attorney about your situation.

General information only — not legal advice.

As of October 2026 · Prepared by JYNX Recruiting · jynxrecruiting.com

One of the Highest Wages in the Country

Washington pairs one of the country's highest state wages with the strongest paper trail in the series: wage ranges are required IN the job posting, tips can never be credited against the wage, and the state runs a paid family and medical leave insurance program that pays up to 90% of your wages. Seattle-area cities add their own higher floors on top. And read the non-compete section closely: Washington has voted to void non-competes entirely. That change is enacted and dated, but it does not take effect until June 30, 2027.

- Minimum wage: \$17.13 an hour in 2026, adjusted every year with the cost of living. \$17.73 is announced for January 1, 2027. Workers aged 14 to 15 may be paid 85% (\$14.56 in 2026).
- Cities may set higher floors: Seattle \$21.30, Tukwila \$21.65, Bellingham \$19.13, and SeaTac \$20.74 for hospitality and transportation work. Your city's rate beats the state's where it is higher.

Tips: No Tip Credit

- NO TIP CREDIT. Your employer pays the full minimum wage, and every tip belongs to you.
- Tip pools are allowed with rules: salaried-exempt managers and owners may not share; kitchen staff may be included; and no one may be forced to contribute more than the tips they received.
- If you are charged a service charge, the business must disclose what portion, if any, goes to staff.

Your Paycheck and Final Pay

- Pay at least monthly, on regular paydays. Your FINAL paycheck is due on or before the next regularly scheduled payday, whether you quit or are fired.
- An employer may not hold your final check over unreturned property or equipment.

Overtime

- Time and a half after 40 hours in a week. There is no daily overtime.
- Farmworkers are now fully inside the rule: the phase-in finished January 1, 2024, so the agricultural threshold is 40 hours too.
- Salaried exempt status requires both the duties tests and the salary level: \$1,541.70 a week in 2026 for most employers.

Meal and Rest Breaks: The Most Specific in the Series

- A 30-minute meal period on a shift over 5 hours, starting no less than 2 hours and no more than 5 hours into the shift. It is paid if you must stay on duty or on call (WAC 296-126-092).
- Plus a PAID 10-minute rest break for every 4 hours worked, and you may not be made to work more than 3 hours without one.

Paid Sick Leave

- Accrue 1 hour for every 40 hours worked, at EVERY employer. There is no size carve-out.
- Usable after 90 days, for illness, care, domestic-violence matters, workplace or school closures for health reasons, and immigration proceedings. At least 40 unused hours carry over.

Paid Family and Medical Leave

- Washington's state insurance program is LIVE. If you worked 820 hours in Washington in the qualifying period, you can claim up to 12 weeks (16 combined; 18 with pregnancy incapacity), paying up to 90% of your wages, capped at \$1,647 a week in 2026.
- Funded by a premium of 1.13% of wages (tips excluded, capped at the Social Security wage base): 71.43% from you, 28.57% from your employer. Employers under 50 owe no employer share.
- Job protection expanded January 1, 2026: employers with 25 or more employees, after 180 days on the job.

Job Postings Must Show the Pay

- Employers with 15 or more employees must put the wage scale or salary range AND a description of benefits and other compensation IN every job posting (RCW 49.58.110).
- Since July 27, 2025, an employer who gets written notice of a non-compliant posting has 5 business days to fix it before penalties run. Violations carry administrative and civil remedies, with scales of \$100 to \$5,000 per violation.

Non-Competes: Today's Thresholds, a Dated Change

- TODAY: a non-compete is enforceable only against employees earning over \$126,858.83 a year (independent contractors: \$317,147.09) in 2026. You must receive the terms by the time you accept the job. Terms longer than 18 months are presumed unreasonable. If you are laid off, the employer must keep paying your base salary for the restriction period, or the agreement fails. And an employer may not bar a worker earning under twice the minimum wage (\$34.26 an hour in 2026) from a second job.
- THE CHANGE, ENACTED AND DATED: from JUNE 30, 2027, Washington law voids non-compete agreements statewide, and employers must notify affected workers by October 1, 2027. Until that date, today's thresholds are the law. This is enacted, chaptered law, not a proposal, and it is not yet in force.

Seattle Scheduling

- Seattle's Secure Scheduling law covers employers with 500 or more employees worldwide in retail and food service; full-service restaurant chains are also covered at 40 or more locations.
- Covered workers are owed: a good-faith schedule estimate at hire, 14 days' advance notice of schedules, predictability pay for employer changes, and a premium for back-to-back closing and opening shifts.

If Something Goes Wrong

- File a Worker Rights Complaint with L&I, online, by mail, in person, or at 1-866-219-7321: within 3 YEARS for wage claims; retaliation complaints within 180 days.
- Discrimination complaints go to the Washington State Human Rights Commission: file within SIX MONTHS of the harm (12 months for pregnancy-related claims). The Commission covers employers with 8 or more employees.