In the final hours of his presidency in 1913, President Taft signed the act that created the Department of Labor. The Department’s original mission statement sought “to foster, promote and develop the welfare of working people, to improve their working conditions, and to enhance their opportunities for profitable employment.” In 1938, the Wage and Hour Division (WHD) Office was established following the passing of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The FLSA established the right to a minimum wage and time and a half overtime pay when a worker accumulates more than 40 hours per week.

The WHD is a federal agency operating in all 50 states and is comprised of a wide variety of staff including investigators, supervisors, analysts, technicians, and administrative employees. The office is responsible for enforcing and administering the following: minimum wage, overtime, child labor laws, break time for nursing mothers, job protections for family and medical leave, polygraph protection rights, and working conditions outlined by the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act. These laws protect over 135 million workers in more than 7.3 million establishments. WHD investigations seek to ensure that workers are fairly compensated for their hours worked and typically awards employees who were illegally compensated with back wages. In the last 5 years, more than $1.3 billion in back wages were returned to the workers in the US.

“The Wage and Hour mission is to promote and achieve compliance with labor standards to protect and enhance the welfare of the Nation’s workforce.”

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