$192 Million in Fines: The Cost of Wage Violations in Massachusetts

Lucia Qin

2025-02-16

It’s a staggering figure: $192,020,817. This is the total amount assessed in fines for labor violations in Massachusetts in 2024, according to [Fair Labor Division enforcement data](https://massago.hylandcloud.com/231dashboards/Viewer.aspx?enc=AUvyW%2fR9j0u6SC3HMlb06c0CeddIkbBxfJ1ogyC5rxVOAdEvGDBHK3EOkvO2J%2fCK9mOBC3%2bqgrEwJ2t12lRGTx6aIVaak6SdHgf8vnYB3HJonaeMLP%2f%2f5yo2OSurzYmq4ORTSLoduK9psPiD6xYXMZjSkBIEdYvO5BRwEspMgd%2fmiZtDZljp1zy9AydheqoEbaFmUWVsnBTow8zTCJZlREBQpe%2beBS%2b7nEDk%2fCb4Dzli). This number highlights a persistent issue—employers failing to adhere to wage laws, leaving workers shortchanged and struggling to recover their rightful earnings. These fines serve as a warning, but the underlying problem remains largely unresolved, impacting thousands of employees across the state.

## The Most Frequent Violation

The most frequent violation in Massachusetts in 2024 was failure to make timely payment. From small businesses to large corporations, the same infraction appears repeatedly, underscoring a systemic problem in employer payroll practices. Many workers depend on timely wages to pay for rent, food, and other necessities, making any delay a significant financial burden. The restaurant and hotel industry topped the list for the most violations, where inconsistent payment practices further contribute to economic insecurity for employees, many of whom already earn low wages. Yet, delays in paychecks remain a widespread and costly issue.

The Fair Labor Division of Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office has been actively pursuing enforcement actions to companies found in violation of wage laws. Despite these efforts, some businesses continue to skirt the rules, either by misclassifying employees, withholding final paychecks, or failing to pay overtime wages. These violations not only disrupt workers’ financial stability but also contribute to further economic disparities, particularly among low-income and immigrant workers who may be more vulnerable to exploitation.

## Unresolved Cases

Despite the hefty fines levied, only 653 of the total 1068 cases in Massachusetts in 2024 were marked as fully paid. That means hundreds of violations remain unresolved, leaving employees waiting or, in some cases, never receiving what they are owed. The slow pace of resolution can be frustrating for workers, who often face bureaucratic hurdles when attempting to recover unpaid wages.

## The Bigger Picture

The $192 million figure represents more than just penalties. It’s a snapshot of labor struggles across industries, particularly in service-sector jobs where wage theft is most common. While enforcement agencies continue to crack down on violators, the question remains: Will these penalties lead to meaningful change, or will wage violations remain a persistent and expensive reality in Massachusetts?

With millions at stake and workers’ livelihoods hanging in the balance, the fight for fair pay is far from over.