

**Testimony presented by Laine Romero-Alston,
Director of Research and Policy
Community Development Project, Urban Justice Center**

**to the Health, Labor, and Consumer Affairs Committees for the
hearing on "The State of Wages & Working Conditions of Restaurant Workers, and Its
Impact on the Public Health"
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Good afternoon members of the Health, Labor and Consumer Affairs Committees. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and commend this effort to understand the state of wages and working conditions of New York City's restaurant workers. My name is Laine Romero-Alston and I am the Director of Research and Policy for the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center. As the primary researchers for the study that served as the basis for the Restaurant Opportunities Center's groundbreaking report *Behind the Kitchen Door: Pervasive Inequality in New York City's Thriving Restaurant Industry*, we want to emphasize some of the most concerning findings of the report and speak specifically about issues of considerable complexity that the industry currently faces.

It is important to underscore the general finding of the research, as highlighted through previous testimony, that across the board the industry is plagued with serious and dangerous problems related to the prevalence of below poverty wages¹, lack of supportive benefits² and opportunities for mobility in the industry³, and pervasive employment and labor violations, such as minimum wage and overtime wage violations⁴. These "low road" practices have serious implications for the workers in the industry; but also put the health and safety of the public at risk, as our research found that workers who reported employment law violations at their place of work were also much more likely to report workplace practices that could have harmful effects on the health and safety of customers⁵.

¹ 80% of workers we surveyed made less than poverty level wages.

² 90% did not receive health insurance from their employers and only 27% reported having any health insurance at all. 84% did not receive paid sick days and 70% did not get paid sick days.

³ 60% do not receive regular raises, 71% of never been promoted in their current job and another 71% reported that they did not move up from their last job to their current one. 67% reported that they do not receive the training from their employer needed to be promoted.

⁴ 13% reported minimum wage violations, 59% reported overtime wage violations, 57% reported working more than 4 hours straight without a paid break, and 19% of tipped workers reported that management illegally takes a share of their tips.

⁵ For example, 66% of workers who experienced many labor violations did not receive health and safety training as compared to 34% of workers who experienced few violations. Moreover, 38% of workers who experienced many