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# NJ Labor Department Plays Santa to Unpaid Workers

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 26, 2019

**TRENTON** – Two former employees of an Ocean County pizzeria on Tuesday got a visit from Santa’s helper, who delivered a most valuable gift: back pay they were owed for shifts worked long ago.

Luigi’s Pizza in Ocean agreed to pay the back wages – amounting to \$1,027.50 net – to the employees after the Labor Department’s Wage and Hour Division issued one of its first stop-work orders under a new wage theft law that allows the department to shut businesses that underpay employees in certain situations.

When faced with the shutdown of his business, the owner immediately wrote a check for the entire back wage amount, based on a judgment. The check was deposited with the state Treasury on December 20, which enabled the workers to receive their checks before Christmas.

“Our mission all year long is to help workers who are being shortchanged and to protect businesses that play by the rules,” said Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo. “The fact that these workers received their back pay on Christmas Eve shows the extraordinary efforts of our Wage & Hour and Finance and Accounting staffs, as well as our colleagues at Treasury.”

Assistant Director of Wage & Hour Barry Hickey came in on his day off to play Santa, minus the red suit, for the workers.

“I’m so appreciative of the Labor Department for helping me out,” said Hailey Farina of Long Branch, who received a check for \$567.50 for hours she worked behind the counter at Luigi’s but was never paid. “I went through the process and won, but I didn’t expect I’d actually get paid.”

Hailey, who is getting ready to move, said the money will help pay her moving expenses.

The second worker, Nicholas DeConie, 19, of Wall, received a check for \$460. He worked as a pizza maker at Luigi’s when he was 17, according to his mother, Jennifer, but was never paid.

“He was so happy,” said his mom. “When I filed the paperwork, he told me it was a waste of time and he’d never get paid. I said, ‘we’re doing it anyway.’”

Gov. Murphy signed legislation in August that expanded the state’s ability to enforce the state’s wage theft law by giving the Labor Commissioner the authority to issue a stop work order at any business where certain wage law violations have occurred.

“This is a valuable enforcement tool that gives us the ability to stop bad actors in their tracks, and make sure workers receive every cent they have earned,” said Asaro-Angelo.

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Aug 19, 2021



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As of the latest reporting, more than \$33 billion in unemployment benefits have been sent to Garden State workers. With federal benefits set to expire on September 4, we encourage everyone to check your email and visit [MyUnemployment.nj.gov](http://MyUnemployment.nj.gov) for updates and available resources.



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