



Warehouse Workers for Justice

Food Systems Work

Chicagoland's food distribution and logistics industry has been an anchor of the region's economy since the 19th century. Six of the United States' seven Class 1 railroads pass through Chicagoland, where huge teams of workers unload, unpack, process, repack, and reload everything from corn to pork chops to frozen pizza.

But the enormous amount of human labor underlying those food systems has always been hidden from consumers - first behind the Stockyard Gates at 47th street, and then pushed out to vast anonymous warehouses in the south suburbs. And the workers in Chicago's regional food system continue to struggle with low wages, precarious and unstable jobs, violations of their legal rights, and racial and sexual discrimination in the workplace.

Warehouse Workers for Justice fights for workers in the global food supply chain - workers praised as essential but often treated as disposable.

Worker organizing

As a worker center, WWJ provides support, resources, and expertise to warehouse workers organizing around issues such as job safety during COVID-19. For example, WWJ supported a group of workers at a Mars Wrigley warehouse seeking hazard pay, paid sick leave, and COVID-19 accommodations. Temp work and subcontracting structures in warehouses are designed to hinder traditional union organizing: our work seeks avenues to build worker power despite these challenges. When possible, we also connect workers with traditional union organizers.

Research

Based on in-depth organizing conversations and survey responses from nearly 100 workers in food production, distribution, and logistics, WWJ is collaborating with Chicago Workers Collaborative, Temp Worker Justice, Raise the Floor Alliance, and Partners for Dignity and Rights to write the first of two planned reports on working conditions in Chicagoland's food production, distribution, and logistics industry. The first report highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the many ways employers are still failing to keep workers safe.

Advocacy

With little visibility and low levels of union representation, food warehouse workers are in danger of being overlooked by policymakers. WWJ partners with aligned organizations to advocate on behalf of these workers and amplify worker voices. Most recently, WWJ has taken the lead in urging the Illinois Department of Public Health to prioritize food warehouse workers for COVID-19 vaccine access. Warehousing and manufacturing is second only to long-term care work in workplace COVID-19 outbreaks. This is a particularly pressing concern for temp workers, many of whom are returning citizens with few other options for employment.

Access to Justice outreach

Food warehouse workers face wage theft, retaliation for organizing, overtime violations, and other legal issues every day. Through our Access to Justice outreach, WWJ educates workers on their rights and connects them to legal assistance as necessary.