

N E W S R E L E A S E

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Labor Commissioner Cites Wholesale Bakery over \$185,000 for Wage Theft Violations

San Diego—California Labor Commissioner Julie A. Su cited a Vista-based wholesaler that sells its gourmet cookies to Whole Foods and gourmet grocery stores for multiple wage theft violations, with assessments totaling \$185,055.

The investigation revealed that Cookies con Amore systematically denied overtime pay, rest breaks and meal periods to 73 workers, and forced some of them to sign a statement agreeing to the wage theft violations.

“California workers deserve to be paid fairly and fully for their labor, and employers who deny them their wages and benefits will be held accountable,” said Christine Baker, Director of the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). The Labor Commissioner’s Office, also known as the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement (DLSE), is a division within DIR.

Investigators interviewed employees and conducted an audit that revealed multiple violations of minimum wage, rest and meal period laws, and overtime premiums between October 2013 and December 2014.

Employees worked shifts of 10 hours or longer, but were paid at the straight time rate without overtime compensation. They were allowed only one 30-minute daily break with no other rest and second meal periods. Some of the workers were forced to sign a written agreement consenting to substandard working conditions. If they disagreed, the workers were told to find another job.

“It violates the fundamental protections guaranteed to California workers to require that they sign away their right to overtime pay and meal and rest breaks in order to keep their jobs,” said Labor Commissioner Julie A. Su. “Wage theft cannot be made legal by forcing workers to agree to substandard working conditions.”

Cookies con Amore was assessed \$120,665 including \$51,444 in overtime wages, and \$69,221 in rest and meal time periods which will be paid to the affected workers, and an additional \$63,800 in civil penalties.

The Labor Commissioner's investigation was prompted after the Labor Commissioner received complaints from California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), a non-profit legal services program.

"We appreciate the brave workers who cooperated with our investigation and the California Rural Legal Assistance, a critical partner to us in helping workers come forward and report such violations," Su added.

The Labor Commissioner's Office, formally known as the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement, inspects workplaces for wage and hour violations, adjudicates wage claims, enforces prevailing wage rates and apprenticeship standards in public works projects, investigates retaliation and whistleblower complaints, issues licenses and registrations for businesses, and educates the public on labor laws. Updated information on [California labor laws](#) is available online.

The [Wage Theft is a Crime](#) public awareness campaign, launched last year by DIR and its Labor Commissioner's Office, has helped inform workers of their rights. The campaign includes multilingual print and outdoor advertising as well as radio commercials on ethnic stations in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmong and Tagalog.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may call the toll-free California Workers' Information Line at (866) 924-9757 for recorded information in Spanish and English.

Members of the press may contact Erika Monterroza at (510) 286-1164 or Peter Melton at (510) 286-7046 for additional details.

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The [California Department of Industrial Relations](#), established in 1927, protects and improves the health, safety, and economic well-being of over 18 million wage earners, and helps their employers comply with state labor laws. DIR is housed within the [Labor & Workforce Development Agency](#). For non-media inquiries, contact DIR's Communications Call Center at 1-844-LABOR-DIR (1-844-522-6734) for help in locating the appropriate [division or program](#) in our department.