

Berkeley City Council Unanimously Passes Sweatfree Procurement Ordinance

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For Immediate Release

On June 23, the City of Berkeley became to become the 39th city in the nation to pass an ordinance mandating that goods purchased by the city be manufactured free of sweatshop conditions

After over three years of work, the Berkeley City Council, in a 9-0 vote, passed a Sweatfree Purchasing Ordinance at its June 23 meeting, becoming the 39th city in the United States to do so. Berkeley joined the national Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium in July 2007 and has spent the remaining two years working to reach agreement on the details of an ordinance.

"This ordinance represents one of the strongest nationally and covers the essential elements for successful implementation. In addition, I applaud the city for signaling a plan for ongoing membership in the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium for independent monitoring of labor conditions and sweatshop-free sourcing," said Liana Foxvog of SweatFree Communities, a national organization that promotes sweatshop-free procurement.

Representatives from the Berkeley Commission on Labor, the Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission, and various organizations came together with Berkeley's city staff to create the consensus document that went before the Berkeley City Council at its meeting. The ordinance will affect garments purchased by the City of Berkeley at the \$25,000 level or above and include a provision to consider lowering the threshold and phase in other goods and services over time. The language requires that vendors disclose manufacturing locations of their suppliers and ensure that the workers who actually produce the goods enjoy freedom of association and a non-poverty wage.

Activists who supported the ordinance as well as city officials applauded the decision.

"Most uniforms and apparel are made by young women and sometimes children who toil long hours under harsh conditions for poverty wages," said Peace and Justice Commissioner Diana Bohn. "Now, our city will not reward these unethical labor practices and foster worker rights and economic recovery rather than fuel the race to the bottom."

Some felt that the vote reasserted Berkeley's leadership on this issue after witnessing the passage of ordinances in such public entities as the City of San Francisco, the State of Maine, and Madison, Wisconsin.

"Sweatfree advocates around the country will be heartened to see Berkeley become the 39th city to pass a Sweatfree Purchasing Ordinance," said Sarah Church, Program Director for the

Progressive Jewish Alliance, which took part in the campaign for a sweatshop-free Berkeley. "Coupled with the City's earlier resolution to join the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium, this step cements Berkeley's leadership in the powerful movement to end public procurement of garments made through exploitation. In addition, I applaud the City Council's commitment to lowering the dollar threshold for contracts subject to the policy. Now that we have an Ordinance, an ongoing process of lowering the threshold will further ensure that Berkeley taxpayers' dollars will not be spent on goods made in unjust conditions. Berkeley's Sweatfree Procurement Ordinance is a victory for garment workers everywhere."

At the same time, supporters of the ordinance agreed that expanding the scope of the language will be critical to the ordinance's effectiveness.

"I hope that once the City has six months' experience in implementation, it will consider lowering the ordinance's threshold so that it applies to medium and small apparel contracts as well so that more workers can benefit," said Liana Foxvog.

Igor Tregub, Vice-Chair of the Berkeley Commission on Labor, added: "To truly ensure the rights of workers, passage of the ordinance is just the end of the beginning. Valuable lessons in disclosure that we will gain must be incorporated into the language until all vendors are covered."

The Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium currently offers information about certified sweatfree vendors of some apparel classes, such as T-shirts and polo shirts, to cities and states. As more public entities join the consortium, it plans to expand the scope of public knowledge available on vendors' and subcontractors' employment practices.

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SweatFree Communities coordinates a national network of grassroots campaigns that promote humane working conditions in apparel and other labor-intensive global industries by working with both public and religious institutions to adopt sweatshop-free purchasing policies. Using institutional purchasing as a lever for worker justice, the sweatfree movement empowers ordinary people to create a just global economy through local action. Learn more at www.sweatfree.org.

The Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium, comprised of states, cities, counties, local government agencies, and school districts, as well as human rights advocates and labor rights experts, will pool resources of public entities to investigate working conditions in factories that make uniforms and other products for public employees. Cities and states will hold vendors to ethical standards, and create a market large enough to persuade companies to deal responsibly and ethically with their suppliers and workers. Learn more at www.buysweatfree.org.

The Progressive Jewish Alliance is a lead coalition partner in sweatfree campaigns in California. It promotes sweatfree purchasing in Jewish congregations and Jewish organizations nationally. Learn more at www.pjalliance.org.

The City of Berkeley Commission on Labor is an advisory body to the City of Berkeley Council. It establishes policy in the area of labor by preparing reports, developing information and referral services, observing and reviewing labor disputes, and promoting equal rights. Learn more at www.cityofberkeley.info/commissions/labor.

The City of Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission advises the Council and the School Board on issues of peace and social justice. The citizen-run commission creates citizen awareness and develops educational programs. Learn more at www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/commissions/peaceandjustice.