

City of Spokane's Public Dollars for Public Benefit Ordinance

Why Spokane's Construction Mandate Misses the Mark

Most Spokane Construction Workers Will Be Left Out

In Washington State, only about **15% of construction workers are union members** - and in the Spokane region, that number is even lower. That means **85–90% of local construction workers are non-union**. Under a mandatory Community Workforce Agreement (CWA), these workers could be **excluded from city-funded projects**, even if they are qualified, experienced, and already working for local contractors. Instead, they would be required to **join a union and work through a hiring hall**, disrupting their employment, reducing their take-home pay, and disqualifying them from benefits they've already earned. A policy meant to "open doors" would, in reality, shut out the majority of Spokane's workforce.



Wage Theft Is Already Illegal - And Enforced

Advocates claim that a mandatory CWA is necessary to prevent wage theft and protect workers - but this argument ignores the fact that **public works projects in Washington are already subject to strict prevailing wage laws**. Contractors on these jobs must comply with detailed reporting requirements, and violations are enforced by the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. The idea that only union-signatory contractors operate ethically is misleading and offensive to the many reputable non-union contractors who follow the law and treat their workers fairly. We support strong enforcement of existing laws - but **using a CWA to exclude responsible contractors under the guise of enforcement is unnecessary and unfair**.



PLAs Face Growing Legal and Political Resistance

Across the country, courts and policymakers are recognizing the problems with mandatory Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) and taking action against them.

- In 2023, the U.S. Court of Federal Claims struck down a federal PLA mandate, finding it ignored **the government's own research showing PLAs are anti-competitive**. The court further criticized the rule as relying on "arbitrary and capricious" presidential policy.
- The Oregon Supreme Court rejected the Oregon Department of Transportation's PLA requirement, stating: "Employing a tool that has never been utilized before in Oregon - a tool premised on **prioritizing utilization of union labor to the expense of open-shop labor** - is prejudicial. It is an irreparable prejudice to exclude 70% of our contractors."
- Even in California, Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed a PLA bill passed by the Legislature, citing cost concerns: "It results in additional cost pressures that were not accounted for in this year's budget."



Urge Your City Council Member to Vote No on the Public Dollars for Public Benefit Ordinance



Learn more here.

Sample letters, informational pieces and more.



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