



## Seattle Office for Civil Rights

Patricia Lally, Director

### NEWS ADVISORY

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## Seattle Office for Civil Rights files charges to enforce Seattle's Paid Sick Time law

### In 2014, number of charges filed increases by 700%

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) has filed 38 charges against employers in 2014 to enforce Seattle's Paid Sick and Safe Time (PSST) Ordinance – 7 times the number of charges in 2013, the first full year the law was in effect.

The figures reflect a significant change in the City's enforcement strategies, explains SOCR Director Patricia Lally. "During our initial implementation of PSST, we resolved every complaint that employees brought to us, but our focus was on education and compliance," said Lally. "Starting in 2014, we changed our enforcement policies to get tougher on employers who continued to ignore the law."

SOCR also adopted several other strategies in 2014 to toughen PSST enforcement:

- **Company-wide investigations:** SOCR now files Director's Charges to authorize a company-wide investigation whenever there's reason to believe that a PSST violation affects an employer's entire workforce. In 2014, SOCR filed Director's Charges against four businesses. In a Director's Charge, employees maintain anonymity (to the extent possible) while SOCR conducts a full investigation.
- **Increase in monetary recovery:** In 2014, employees received \$37,369 in settlements, compared to \$5,835 collected in 2013.
- **Settlements ensure employees benefits:** In order to settle charges, employers must award their employees PSST hours for the period of noncompliance, pay employees back wages for unpaid PSST absences, keep employees informed of their available balance of PSST hours, pay civil penalties for violations of notice and posting requirements, and comply with all other parts of the law.

“In 2012, PSST was a brand new law both here in Seattle and across the country. We felt it was important to give employers the chance to align PSST with their existing business practices,” said Lally. “But PSST is the law, and we want employers to know the City of Seattle is serious about investigating violations.”

In 2013, SOCR sent out 103 advisory letters and filed 6 charges. An advisory letter notifies the employer that SOCR received a complaint and gives the business approximately 30 days to resolve the issue. So far in 2014, SOCR has sent 45 advisory letters and filed 38 charges. In 2015 SOCR plans to file more Director’s Charges as warranted, and impose civil penalties for all willful violations.

SOCR offers free training and technical assistance for employers on PSST and Seattle’s other Labor Standards laws, like the Job Assistance Ordinance (which regulates employers’ use of criminal history in hiring and other employment decisions). For more information or to report a violation, call 206-684-4500 or visit [www.seattle.gov/psst](http://www.seattle.gov/psst).

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