

## Trump's Project 2025 would let states bypass laws protecting children from harmful working conditions

Corporate lobbyists and right-wing think tanks have been pushing proposals to [weaken child labor laws](#) in 31 states. Donald Trump's Project 2025 agenda takes the attack on children a step further, proposing to let state and local governments obtain waivers ([p. 605](#)) from federal worker protection laws—including the minimum wage, overtime, and harmful forms of child labor.

This proposal is a dream come true for business lobbyists and far-right lawmakers who have already sought to weaken or eliminate child labor standards in state legislatures across the country—often while openly challenging federal standards and their enforcement.

### Project 2025 would put children at risk in the deadliest jobs—with excessive hours and low pay

Project 2025 proposes that Congress pass legislation allowing states to seek “waivers” from landmark federal worker protection laws like the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to “encourage experimentation and reform efforts at the state and local levels.” Though the proposal suggests that states should not be allowed to use such waivers to “take away any current rights held by workers or employers,” the proposal provides no specifics as to how this condition would be enforced or who would determine whether a state “reform” had diminished workers’ rights.

The FLSA includes critical child labor provisions, such as establishing 14 as the minimum age for most legal employment, specifying the hours of work appropriate for children under age 16 to ensure work doesn't interfere with education, and prohibiting youth employment in occupations shown to be especially hazardous for workers under age 18. Many states have set stronger standards, many others reiterate the federal guidelines (making them subject to state as well as federal enforcement), and some have weaker (or no) standards on the books. In areas where

both a state and federal standard exist, employers must comply with whichever is stronger.

Child labor violations are [on the rise](#), and so are [workplace injuries](#) among minors. Last year alone, hundreds of children were employed in violation of federal hazardous occupation orders, and [three teens were killed](#) over a five-week span while illegally employed in dangerous jobs. If states can obtain waivers from the FLSA, it will put more youth workers in extremely dangerous and exploitative employment situations. For instance, employers would not be bound by the federal hazardous occupations orders that protect children from dangerous jobs like mining, roofing, and excavation. The FLSA also limits the length of time minors can be paid “training wages” lower than the full minimum wage. In a state with a FLSA “waiver,” employers could pay youth subminimum training wage rates indefinitely.

### **Worst-case scenario: Wyoming**

If the state of Wyoming acquired a “waiver” from the FLSA:

- Workers would no longer have the right to a federal minimum wage of \$7.25 and could be paid as little as \$5.15 an hour, the Wyoming [state minimum wage](#).
- Employers could hire children as young as age 14 to work [8 hours per day](#), including during the school day (not during school hours) and until 10 p.m. on school nights.
- Employers could hire children as young as age 14 to do dangerous work in nearly all 17 [hazardous occupations](#)—including roofing, mining, and excavation—currently prohibited for minors under federal law. Wyoming state law [only prohibits](#) children under age 16 from work in two vaguely defined types of hazardous work (jobs using heavy construction equipment or work around dangerous chemicals).

### **Not an idle threat: Some states are already trying to undermine federal child labor laws**

The possibility of states seeking waivers from the FLSA is not just hypothetical. Several states have already signaled opposition to current FLSA child labor guidelines or have even enacted legislation that would allow states agencies to waive federal child labor protections, just like Project 2025 proposes.

In 2023, an Ohio lawmaker proposed allowing employers to schedule 14-year-olds for longer year-round hours (including on school days) than what is allowed under federal law. They also [introduced a resolution](#) calling on Congress to enact into federal law the changes proposed in the Ohio state bill. This proposal was [supported by](#) a billionaire-funded, right-wing think tank and multiple industry lobbying groups. For a state like Ohio, the FLSA stands in the way of their interest in expanding employer access to cheap, exploitable child workers. If Ohio gets a waiver from the FLSA, there will be nothing to stop them.

Iowa has already [implemented](#) the concept of “waivers” from child labor laws by recently passing a law that allows state agencies to waive restrictions on hazardous work for 16- and 17-year-olds in a long list of dangerous occupations, including demolition, roofing, excavation, and power-driven machine operation. All these jobs are prohibited for minors under federal law, so Iowa’s new law directly violates federal standards—and employers who put teens on such jobs will be violating federal law, even if the state has granted their permission. The governor of Iowa, who signed this bill into law, has [called on the U.S. Department of Labor](#) to “look to Iowa as an example of how to do this better.” If Iowa can seek a FLSA waiver, their weaker state standards will no longer be in conflict with federal law, and employers will be able to hire 16-year-olds to work in some of the deadliest jobs in our economy.

At a time when child labor violations are on the rise and states are simultaneously attempting to weaken child labor protections, the FLSA serves as an essential floor for child labor standards, ensuring minimum protections against the most oppressive child labor conditions. Instead of committing to strengthen these standards, Trump’s Project 2025 proposes making these standards optional and letting states—some of whose current leaders are openly contemptuous of federal law—decide whether children are worth protecting from excessive or dangerous work.

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