

**Written Testimony Submitted by
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**Before the
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment
District of Columbia**

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the problem of sweatshops, and the solution to this problem provided by our proposed Sweatfree DC amendment to the Omnibus Procurement Reform Amendment Act of 2010 introduced by Council member Mary Cheh. I represent the International Labor Rights Forum, or ILRF, an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment of workers worldwide. One of ILRF's campaigns is SweatFree Communities which works to improve working conditions in apparel and other labor-intensive global industries by promoting the adoption and enforcement of sweatfree policy at all levels of US government. The campaign's efforts have resulted, to date, in the adoption of sweatfree procurement policies by over 180 public entities in the US, including the states of California, Illinois, New York, Maine, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Let me start by explaining the problem that our amendment and the subsequent Sweatfree Procurement Policy that it would create, has the potential to address. Over the past three decades, we have witnessed the wide scale flight of domestic production of apparel to low-wage countries with unsafe and exploitative working conditions. We are not an organization that opposes global trade, per se, but we cannot ignore the fact that the flight of these industries is driven by the 'race to the bottom.' Multinational corporations seek out production destinations where there is little or no regulation of labor or environmental conditions; they find such destinations in the developing world.

I lived and worked with young women in Cambodia and Indonesia where I have also had the opportunity to meet and have frank conversations with young women producing garments for the US market. Mari was a young friend of mine in Indonesia, working in a garment factory. Her factory was a small warehouse, where about 300 girls worked, all sewing T-shirts for export to the US and Europe. When it rained the girls would stand at their machines, ankle-deep in water, as there was not sufficient drainage. The girls typically worked 10 to 12 hours per day, six days a week and a half-day on Sundays.

They were not paid for overtime, and were forced to meet targets of production to receive their wages. Wages were often paid late, as the factory manager claimed he had not been paid by the buyer. The girls lived in small shacks in the area nearby the factory; they shared rooms, often six to eight people to a rented room. By the time the girls had paid for rent, food, and water (yes, they did not have access to potable water), they had virtually no money left over for any other purpose. Mari and her friends, and their working conditions, were so much like the conditions I saw in many other countries. This is the way an unregulated apparel industry treats its workers.

Do these things happen in factories producing uniforms and other goods for the US market? We can assure you they do. To cite just a few examples: Collectively, from 2004-2009 DC has purchased over \$9 million in apparel from Morgan's, or Jimmie Muscatello's, and currently it holds the single largest apparel contract with the city for over \$2 million. Morgan's supplies numerous brands including Blauer. Blauer sourced some of its apparel from the Hui Yang Charming Garments factory in China where confirmed reports of excessive and illegal overtime; 390 hours of a work a month, nearly double the legal maximum, have been confirmed. There were also confirmed reports of child labor; girls as young as 14 years old working the same excessive hours as their adult counterparts. Because DC does not require Morgan's to provide up to date factory disclosure information so that third party investigations can be carried out, it is impossible to know what connection DC has to this factory.

We urge the committee to promote a new legislative remedy for workers' rights abuses in the global supply chains that sell products to the District of Columbia by supporting the addition of our proposed Sweatfree DC amendment to Bill 18-610. This is not only good for workers, but good for the district and good for business. By ensuring that tax dollars do not subsidize profiteering from human rights abuses, a Sweatfree Procurement Policy will help create a more stable and sustainable business environment. By establishing a sweatfree manufacturing code of conduct and requiring vendors to disclose factory locations and wages, the bill will create an even playing field for all bidders. No one will be able to undercut anyone else with sweatshop products.

The District of Columbia can also use this as an opportunity to demonstrate its leadership by joining with Maine, Pennsylvania and other state and municipal governments through the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium. States and cities have taken this step as they face the challenge of finding resources for, and expertise in, factory monitoring and remediation programs. By pooling resources and expertise, public institutions will be able to ensure that all vendors have access to reliable and up-to-date information about sweatfree suppliers. A professional and independent human rights monitor will provide this information to all consortium members. Collaboration with other public entities will also foster common standards across the nation, helping businesses to expand by using a single set of information to comfortably bid on jobs to any and all consortium members.

ILRF also supports the responsible contractor amendment offered by SEIU 32BJ and knows that the stories of the Hawk One workers are just a few of the many workers that are impacted by DC procurement. I will add personally that after twenty years of work to

tackle the problem of global sweatshops through legislative approaches, voluntary approaches, and even litigation, I feel this effort represents a tremendous breakthrough. We strongly encourage the Council member Cheh and the Committee to consider our Sweatfree DC amendment and we look forward to working with the District of Columbia as it leads the way on a new path forward for worker rights.