

Meal and rest break rights for certain health care workers



Background

Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5236, and other legislation passed since 2023, clarified labor standards and enforcement regarding uninterrupted meal and rest breaks and other rights for certain health care workers. This fact sheet provides you basic information on coverage, and what to do if you feel your rights are violated. See [Lni.wa.gov/HLS](https://lni.wa.gov/HLS) for details.

Who's covered

Generally, this law covers employees involved in direct patient care or clinical services at state-licensed hospitals. You're covered if you receive an hourly wage or are included in a collective bargaining agreement.

Workers' rights under the law

Under the law, a scheduled meal and rest break can't be interrupted unless:

- There is a specific, unforeseeable emergency. This includes a catastrophic event, or an emergency declaration.
- An unforeseeable clinical circumstance takes place with a significant, adverse, effect on a patient's condition.

Employees covered by this law must receive:

- A 30-minute meal break between the second and fifth hour of work, and another for each five hours worked after, and;
- A 10-minute paid rest break for every four hours worked.

Starting January 2026, employees may voluntarily choose to waive some meal breaks — subject to employer agreement. See [Lni.wa.gov/HLS](https://lni.wa.gov/HLS) for information.

Filing a complaint

If you feel your meal and rest break rights have been violated, you can file a complaint:

- Online: [Lni.wa.gov/HLS](https://lni.wa.gov/HLS)
- By phone: 360-902-5484
- In person: Visit your nearest L&I office ([Lni.wa.gov/Offices](https://lni.wa.gov/Offices))
- Mail: download, print, complete and mail the HLS complaint form (F700-227-000) to:
 - Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
Healthcare Labor Standards Program
PO Box 44279
Tumwater, WA 98501

In your complaint, be sure to attach any supporting documents or other relevant information.

Note: It is against the law for a business to fire or otherwise retaliate against an employee who exercises a protected right, intends to file a complaint, or has discussed potential violations of their rights. File a complaint if you feel you have been subject to retaliation.

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