

# **U.S. tax dollars still spent in sweatshops**

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Contact:

Bjorn Claeson, SweatFree Communities, 207-262-7277, 207-949-2375 (cell)

Liana Foxvog, SweatFree Communities, 413-320-7276

*Interviews and photographs available upon request*

## **Child labor, forced and unpaid overtime, toxic conditions found in government contractors' facilities; Human rights groups rally at Post Offices and State Houses in 17 cities across the country**

Bangor, Maine – Federal, state and local tax dollars are being used to buy products made in sweatshops, according to a new report released today by SweatFree Communities. But, the report says, more local and state governments are adopting policies that would require government contractors to meet a set of ethical standards, and advocates are calling on elected officials to join the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium to end tax dollar support for sweatshops.

Findings include child labor, obligatory pregnancy tests, firing and blacklisting of workers who support a union, poverty wages, and forced and unpaid overtime. At least three workers in two factories who participated in interviews for this report have since been fired from their jobs, allegedly for having spoken publicly about conditions in their factories. Subsidizing Sweatshops II: How our tax dollars can foster worker rights and economic recovery rather than fuel the race to the bottom follows the groundbreaking 2008 first report. It is based on in-depth interviews with over 100 workers in 8 factories spanning five countries who produce uniforms for public employees such as police officers and parks service employees for nine major uniform brands. Four of the case studies are newly-researched factories, while four look at what improvements have been made in factories researched for the 2008 report.

“There are comparatively many adolescents and child workers, and their work is the same kind as that done by adult workers,” said a worker from the Genfort Shoes factory in Guangdong Province, China, where Ohio-based Rocky Brands, a major government contractor, manufactures several lines of boots. “When people come to inspect, the children are told to hide,” said another Genfort Shoes worker.

“Every week I have to choose which of the bills I will be able to pay. I pay \$600 for rent, \$200 for gas, \$100 for car insurance, and then there is the telephone and other bills. But I only make \$250 a week... and we haven't even talked about food!” says Lesbi, a worker at the Eagle Industries factory in New Bedford, Mass., which manufactures tactical gear for state governments and the United States military.

Elected officials, clergy, business owners, labor leaders, and students gathered today at U.S. Post Offices and state houses in at least 17 U.S. cities to release Subsidizing Sweatshops II and call for end to taxpayer support for sweatshops.

“We have a choice: we can use our tax dollars to elevate conditions for working people, or our tax dollars can fuel the race to the bottom that has cost hundreds of thousands of U.S. workers their jobs and led to inhumane sweatshop conditions around the world,” said Bjorn Claeson, Executive Director of SweatFree Communities and author of the report. “By joining the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium, our cities and states can make a real difference in the lives of working people while helping to create a more sustainable economy.”

Groups are calling on governors and local elected officials to join the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium, which would stop tax dollar support for sweatshop abuses and level the playing field for ethical U.S. businesses. Since the first report on taxpayer support for sweatshops was published in July 2008, more states and cities have committed to join the Consortium, including the State of Pennsylvania; the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; the City of Portland, Oregon; and the City of Olympia, Washington.

Download the report at [www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing](http://www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing).

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SweatFree Communities coordinates a national network of grassroots campaigns that promote humane working conditions in apparel and other labor-intensive global industries by working with both public and religious institutions to adopt sweatshop-free purchasing policies. Using institutional purchasing as a lever for worker justice, the sweatfree movement empowers ordinary people to create a just global economy through local action. Learn more at [www.sweatfree.org](http://www.sweatfree.org).

The Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium, comprised of states, cities, counties, local government agencies, and school districts, as well as human rights advocates and labor rights experts, will pool resources of public entities to investigate working conditions in factories that make uniforms and other products for public employees. Cities and states will hold vendors to ethical standards, and create a market large enough to persuade companies to deal responsibly and ethically with their suppliers and workers. Learn more at [www.buysweatfree.org](http://www.buysweatfree.org).