



Industry Standards Board for Sports Arenas

E. Joseph Miller, Chair

Jeremy Bodary, Secretary

Industry Standard Board for Sports Arenas - Report to Detroit City Council - November 25, 2025

Overview

In July of 2023, the Detroit City Council voted to establish the Detroit Arenas Industry Standards Board, designed to provide arena workers at Little Caesars Arena, Ford Field, and Comerica Park a voice in their wages, working conditions, and hours. The board is composed of arena worker representatives, employers, community stakeholders, and city officials. Over the course of two years, the board had held a series of public meetings to receive testimony from workers, union representatives, arena employers, various policy experts, and members of the public. Through a partnership with Wayne State University led by Dr. Kess Ballentine, two surveys of arena workers were conducted – the first completed and released in November of 2024 and a follow-up survey finalized in August of 2025.

On Thursday, June 12 and July 1, 2025, a committee of the Detroit Arenas Industry Standards Board met to translate the findings from the [“Arena Workers’ Assessment of Their Job Quality & Recommendations for Change: A Report for the Detroit Industry Standards Board for Arena Workers”](#) and the testimony received during ISB meetings into a set of recommendations. These recommendations were unanimously ratified by the Board on September 17, 2025.

Childcare

The issue: Many arena workers are not just full- or part-time employees, but are also full-time parents. The often-unpredictable schedules of arena workers can leave some scrambling to find last-minute childcare or be forced to choose between a family-supporting paycheck or caring for young ones. Arena workers often work schedules that fall outside of traditional childcare hours, making securing childcare even more difficult. According to expert testimony by Dr. Rebecca Frausel, childcare is one of the most significant expenses for Michigan families, often costing more annually than housing. Therefore, the board recommends the following:

1. City Council (and employers) should conduct a childcare needs assessment, further researching the impact that childcare challenges have on arena workers and employers alike¹.
2. City Council can incentivize worksite childcare options, and explore the ability to lift some of the cost burden to the employer via vouchers and subsidies.
3. In both of the above, there should be a specific focus on non-traditional childcare hours, especially evenings and weekends².

Transportation

The issue: In Motor City, it's no secret that transportation infrastructure prioritizes cars over public transit. However, traffic congestion and for certain employees, a lack of dedicated parking on event days creates problems for arena workers trying to clock in on time or return home at a reasonable time. Worker testimony before the ISB highlighted how buses are not only unreliable, but also often inaccessible to workers and require multiple transfers or lengthy wait times. LCA worker Katharine Bennett testified that she has to be at work two-three hours early given unpredictable bus schedules. Employer testimony also cited transportation and lack of access to parking as a major concern. In the August 2025 Wayne State University survey, thirty-nine percent of arena workers reported being unable to get to work on time or at all because of transportation problems at least some of the time.

In cases where employees do have dedicated parking, the walk is often across unlit, highly-trafficked thoroughfares without dedicated security, causing safety concerns. Research shows that long & difficult commutes play a significant role in worker absenteeism, burnout, stress, and overall work performance on the job, as well as difficult family lives due to increased stress and decreased personal time. Therefore, the board recommends the following:

1. City Council should consider municipal subsidies for employer-provided transit benefits, provide incentives to businesses located within the City of Detroit, and facilitate reduced fare or transit voucher discussions with regional transit authorities.
2. Consideration should be given to after-hours security that would increase safety for workers who walk to employer-provided parking facilities³.
3. City Council should conduct a transit needs assessment in order to determine the scope of downtown workers needing consistent, reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation—including neighborhoods where workers live, average commute times, traffic congestion impacts, station locations, and additional infrastructure.
 - a. This assessment should include consideration of how municipal parking lots can accommodate the needs of arena workers.
4. All of the above should include an eye toward the development of living wage, transit, and transit-adjacent jobs.

¹ Kess L. Ballentine, MA, MSW, PhD. Good Jobs Promote Healthy Communities, March 2025. Pg. 22

² Ibid, pg. 22

³ Ibid, pg. 21

Hiring Hall and Job Training

The issue: In Dr. Kess Ballentine's November 2024 survey, 25% of workers identified Job Security (e.g., training, career ladder, opportunities for promotion) as a top three priority. Employers who sit at the ISB have also expressed a desire for more comprehensive training programs for employees. Lack of adequate job training can contribute to high turnover rates at jobs where the perception is there is little to no opportunity for promotion or career advancement. In addition, the labyrinth of various employers (owners, contractors and subcontractors) across the three major arenas makes it a challenge for arena workers to view and access job opportunities that would help them to achieve full time, living wage employment. Therefore, the board recommends the following:

1. Together with employers, service sector unions, and community partners, explore workforce development programming such as a hiring hall. Via a hiring hall, a comprehensive job training program that is administered in partnership with unions for their members and future arena workers would help address labor shortages in this industry, ensure standardized training for all job classifications, provide support for new hires, and create longer-term benefits such as career ladders⁴. The model will also allow workers to view opportunities across all employers & venues. The city could convene a group of stakeholders to determine the appropriate model.
 - a. Such models include
 - i. Milwaukee Area Service and Hospitality Workers Organization (or MASH). <https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/bucks-arena-district-jobsorganization>
 - ii. Turnaround Tuesdays, Baltimore, Maryland (Hiring Hall model). <https://www.quantifiedventures.com/turnaround-tuesday>
2. Ensure standardized training for all job classes & provide support for benefits and career ladders.

Safety

The issue: Arena workers overwhelmingly report feeling unsafe when leaving their shifts late at night. Whether it's in the parking lots, back entrances, or unlit sections of the arenas, workers should not feel afraid to move from place to place at their worksites. In addition, workers have reported harassment and threats of violence and abuse by guests and coworkers, with not enough onsite security that is trained in de-escalation techniques. It should be noted that arena venue operations include employees working around-the-clock. Event workers are often on the job as long as 8 hours after an event ends. Therefore, the board recommends the following:

1. Employers, labor unions, and City Council can collaborate on policies to build mutual respect and prevent abuse, such as establishing a worker health & safety council that is empowered to implement workplace & occupational safety policies⁵.
2. Enhanced security in parking lots and transit stops, including improved lighting

⁴ Kess L. Ballentine, MA, MSW, PhD. Good Jobs Promote Healthy Communities, March 2025. Pg. 16

⁵ Kess L. Ballentine, MA, MSW, PhD. Good Jobs Promote Healthy Communities, March 2025. Pg. 20

3. Enhance security training, especially for de-escalation tactics⁶.
4. Increase access to apps or text codes that help arena workers report and request assistance to manage potentially dangerous situations.

Preemption

Dr. Kess Ballentine's November 2024 survey found that 85% of arena workers surveyed named wages (e.g., fair wages, cost of living adjustments, regular raises) as a top 3 workplace concern, outpacing every other top workplace concern by 52%. 56% said they lived near or below the federal poverty line. 33% of workers reported health insurance (e.g., better healthcare, cheaper healthcare, insurance access) as a high-level concern. The same survey showed that 72 percent of workers reported no employer provided health care. The follow-up August 2025 survey estimated that 28% of arena workers have health care benefits through Medicaid, which could put workers at risk given major Medicaid policy changes at the federal level.

However, because the State of Michigan enacted extremely restrictive laws that preempt Detroit from enacting labor standards in 2015, the Arena Standards Board and City of Detroit cannot address the chief concerns of arena workers. PA 105 of 2015 prevents any municipality from enacting labor standards on a host of issues, including wages and benefits. In practice, this means Detroit has the full authority to approve tax incentives for arena owners and any other city developer, but is highly restricted in its ability to ensure that Detroit workers benefit from those investments.

While at this phase, the committee has focused on recommendations that the city could take action on, it is worth noting that much more could be done if such restrictions did not exist. As noted in the March 2025 "Good Jobs Promote Healthy Communities" report from Dr. Kess L. Ballentine of Wayne State University, "local governments in Michigan have little power to implement any of the most effective policies at improving job quality and thereby improving this important social determinant of health for its constituents."⁷

Next Steps

Throughout this industry standards board's 2 years of meetings, there have been several notable, positive changes to arena workers' working conditions. For example, after hearing testimony from arena workers regarding a lack of parking for employees, an Employer representative on the board successfully extended parking privileges to their employees. Similarly, collective bargaining agreements negotiated between arena workers' unions and their employers during this 2-year period have won employer paid training funds to address calls for additional training and career development.

The final report created pursuant to Section 12-10-63 of code, shall be distributed to the Mayor and City Council for examination of the recommendations made by an Industry Standards Board, and for potential further action.

⁶ Ibid, pg. 19

⁷ Ibid, pg. 9

City Council may hold further hearings related to the recommendations in the report identified in Section 12-10-63 of the code, and explore methods to educate Detroit workers and industries on those recommendations, and options to assist workers and residents in enforcing all City and State standards for which noncompliance is found to be prevalent in the industry.

Through implementation of codetermination, workplace policies that promote organizer access, and greater workplace transparency, Detroit's arenas will grow in their role as an economic engine for the region in setting high labor standards and contributing back into the local economy. The recommendations of the committee will also set the stage for future collaboration between city government, community, labor, and employers as not only future arenas (including the Detroit City FC Soccer Stadium, AlumniFi Field), but all future development projects take shape in Detroit.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeremy Bodary, Secretary
E. Joseph Miller, Chair