

Governor Baldacci Leads Anti-Sweatshop Movement Among States

From Governor John E. Baldacci's office:

September 18, 2006

AUGUSTA — Governor John Baldacci welcomed news that the governors of Pennsylvania and New Jersey have joined his initiative to end sweatshop exploitation. Governor Baldacci noted that Maine leads the way in this issue, ensuring that employees have fair working conditions and are paid fair wages, here and across the world.

"I am pleased that New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine and Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell have announced that their states will join Maine's new initiative to end sweatshop exploitation in apparel and other industries," said Governor Baldacci. The Governors' Coalition for Sweatfree Procurement and Workers' Rights will use state government procurement as a way to level the playing field for ethical businesses and advance justice for sweatshop workers.

"There's power in numbers," said Governor John E. Baldacci. "We've been doing great work on anti-sweatshop procurement in Maine, but as we team up with other states we'll have even more influence in the global marketplace. Workers around the world deserve any influence or leverage we can bring to the table."

The State of Maine adopted the nation's first sweatfree procurement law in 2001 to end taxpayer support for sweatshop abuses. The centerpiece of the law is a code of conduct requiring state contractors and subcontractors of apparel, textiles, and footwear to adhere to basic international fair labor standards. But "we can accomplish more together" Governor Baldacci noted in a letter he sent to the nation's governors on February 28. Governor Baldacci proposed a new collaborative effort to use state government procurement as a tool level the playing field for ethical businesses and advance justice for sweatshop workers.

"We must not encourage companies that use sweatshops by doing business with them," Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell said. "If companies know they will lose money by continuing to employ this industrial-age practice, they will stop. Businesses can still make money by treating their employees fairly."

The Governor's Coalition for Sweatfree Procurement and Workers' Rights will consider a variety of strategies to end sweatshop abuses including cost-effective and reliable independent monitoring mechanisms of contractor and subcontractor manufacturing facilities. The coalition will also consider forming a purchasing consortium to allow states to leverage purchasing power in support of sweatfree supplier factories.

Below is the text of the letter Governor Baldacci sent to the other governors.

February 28, 2006

Re: Formulation of a Governor's Coalition for Sweatfree Procurement

Dear Governor:

I am writing to invite you to join me in a new collaborative effort to level the playing field for ethical businesses and advance justice for workers laboring in substandard work environments - commonly known and referred to as "sweatshops" - worldwide.

Sweatshop conditions in apparel and other industries around the world and in the United States are well documented. Young women and children work long hours for poverty wages in inhumane conditions until they are worn out and unemployable. These abuses cause untold human suffering and economic and political volatility across the globe.

State government procurement is a tool which we can use responsibly to address this serious problem, as procurement laws and policies may be implemented to stop contractors and vendors that do business with State governments from relying on sweatshop labor as a tool to underbid responsible contractors or to maximize their profits inhumanely.

In 2001, for example, the State of Maine adopted a sweatfree procurement law to end unsuspecting taxpayer support for sweatshop abuses and to help create market demand for fair labor standards. The centerpiece of that law is a contractor- and subcontractor-binding code of conduct, which includes the requirement that contractors and subcontractors adhere to basic international standards of workplace fairness and safety.

Presently we are updating our statutes and our rules to keep them current with emerging best practices. Most significantly, we are taking steps to guarantee sweatfree procurement by examining protocols for independent monitoring and inspecting of supplier factories.

Yet we can accomplish more together. If we work together as States, we can both learn from each other and better leverage our resources.

I propose that we form a coalition of Governors and States - as an initial step to best align our common experience and interests and resources. Our coalition will explore and develop strategies soon after formation, including the possibility of joining existing coalitions of universities and emerging coalitions of cities already working together to put an end to procurement from sweatshops. Moreover, the coalition could consider the use or formation of a consortium - such as the Worker Rights Consortium, which has worked well for universities - to investigate complaints of States' contractors and subcontractors subjecting their workers to sweatshop conditions.

If you are interested in joining this new and important coalition I am proposing, please review the attached resolution, sign it and return it if possible, or contact my staff with any changes that might be necessary for you to come on board. My lead staff person on this initiative is Alan Stearns, who can be reached in my office at (207) 287-3531 (voice); (207) 287-1034 (fax); or

alan.stearns@maine.gov (e-mail). Our goal is to have an initial conference call of signatory or interested coalition members by April 1, 2006. I hope you will come to the table with staff assignments, resources to support their leadership, and recognition that with focus and coordination we can make progress.

Please join me in standing up for good jobs and justice for workers in the United States and around the world. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,
John E. Baldacci
Governor