

California Workplace Rights Notice Enters Its Second Annual Cycle

California's Workplace Know Your Rights Act now includes annual notice requirements, emergency contact rules, and penalties of up to \$10,000 per employee.



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LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, August 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- California's Workplace Know Your Rights Act has passed its first full compliance cycle, and the duties it created have settled into a recurring annual obligation rather than a one-time rollout. Signed into law on Oct. 12, 2025, and operative Jan. 1, 2026, Senate Bill 294 added Part 5.6 to Division 2 of the state Labor Code, beginning at Section 1550. The statute applies to private employers statewide and regardless of company size.

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A notice requirement only changes outcomes when workers read what arrives and keep it.”

Simon Moshkovich, founding partner of Mercer Legal Group.

What the Notice Must Contain and When It Is Due

The law requires a standalone written notice covering five areas of worker protection. Employers must explain workers' compensation benefits; the right to advance

notice when an immigration agency inspects I-9 employment eligibility forms; protections against unfair immigration-related practices; the right to organize and take part in protected concerted activity; and constitutional rights that apply when workers interact with law enforcement or immigration agents at a worksite. The notice must also describe new laws affecting workplace rights and list the government agencies that enforce them.

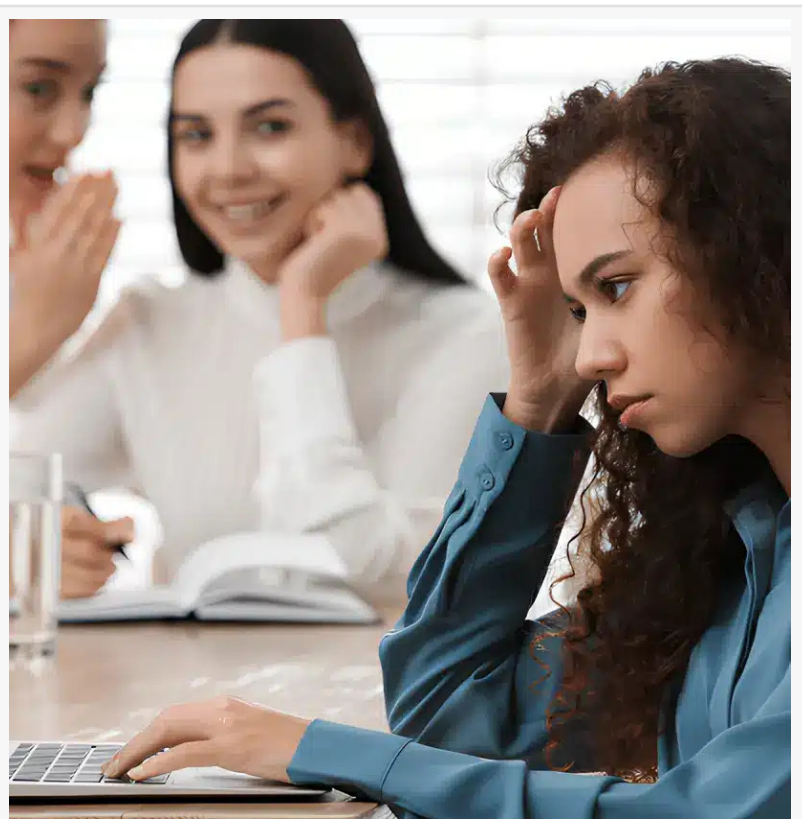
Timing is fixed by statute. Employers had until Feb. 1, 2026, to deliver the notice to every current employee, and the same deadline repeats each year. New hires receive the notice at the time of their hire. Where a workforce is represented, the employer must also provide it to the collective bargaining representative annually. Compliance records must be kept for three years.

A second requirement drew less attention when the bill passed but has proven harder to administer. By March 30, 2026, employers had to give existing employees the chance to designate an emergency contact, and anyone hired after that date must be offered the same

opportunity at hire. If an employer has actual knowledge that a worker has been arrested or detained at the worksite or during working hours, the designated contact must be notified.

Penalty Exposure and the Workers Covered

The penalty structure separates the two obligations. A general violation carries a penalty of up to \$500 per employee. Emergency contact violations accrue at up to \$500 per employee for each day the violation continues, capped at \$10,000 per employee. For a 100-person workforce, a single missed annual notice therefore carries exposure of up to \$50,000, while an unresolved emergency contact failure across the same workforce could reach \$1 million before any other claim is considered.



Workplace Discrimination

The reach of the requirement tracks the size of the state's workforce. Employment Development Department figures released July 17, 2026, put California's civilian labor force at 19,619,300 in June, with 18,595,300 residents employed, 1,024,100 unemployed, and an unemployment rate of 5.2 percent. Total nonfarm payroll jobs stood at 18,144,500 after a loss of 2,900 positions over the month. Because the notice duty applies to private employers regardless of headcount, it attaches to nearly every one of those payroll relationships rather than to a defined subset of larger companies, and the annual repeat means the obligation recurs for each of them every year the employment continues.

Enforcement resources have caught up over the course of the year. The labor commissioner published a model notice in January 2026 and has since expanded it to ten languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, Hindi, Punjabi, Arabic, and Urdu. The office is required to post an updated template every year, and the statute sets a July 1, 2026 deadline for an employer-facing video explaining the requirements. Instructional videos aimed at both workers and employers are now posted by the Department of Industrial Relations alongside the notice templates. Employers that use the official template satisfy the content requirement without drafting a version of their own.

Where Disputes Are Likely to Surface

The statute also creates a paper trail with consequences that extend beyond the notice itself. A worker who receives the annual notice, raises one of the rights it describes, and is then demoted or dismissed has a dated document establishing what the employer had already put in writing. That sequence is the ordinary fact pattern behind a [workplace retaliation claim in California](#), and the notice narrows the space for an employer to argue the right was never communicated.

The organizing and immigration provisions carry similar evidentiary weight. Because the notice describes protected concerted activity and the warning owed before an I-9 inspection, a worker who reports a violation of either provision is asserting a right the employer has formally acknowledged. Complaints of that kind commonly proceed as a [whistleblower retaliation case](#) under existing Labor Code protections, which operate independently of SB 294 and were not displaced by it.

The second annual cycle is where the requirement is most likely to be tested, since employers that treated the February 2026 notice as a single administrative task will meet the same deadline again. Worker-side employment firms in California, among them Mercer Legal Group, handle the claims that follow when an employee asserts one of the rights the notice describes and is penalized for doing so. A question that starts with the notice itself can widen into a review of whether a [California employee rights lawyer](#) should examine the conduct behind it.

About Mercer Legal Group

Mercer Legal Group is a California employment law firm dedicated to representing employees. The firm specializes in workplace issues such as discrimination, harassment, wrongful termination, and retaliation. They also handle whistleblower cases, leave, and accommodation matters, serving clients across various locations, including Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Santa Ana, Pasadena, Anaheim, West Covina, and Bakersfield. Spanish language services are available.

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