

Youth Worker Rights in Georgia

Minors, Hours & Pay Rules: A comprehensive guide for high school students navigating employment permits, federal hour limits, minimum wage, and workplace protections.

Entering the workforce is a major milestone that builds financial independence and professional skills. However, young workers are uniquely vulnerable to exploitation if they do not understand their legal protections. Employment for minors is strictly regulated by both the federal *Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)* and Georgia state law. These regulations are designed to ensure that employment does not interfere with a student's education or pose a threat to their health and safety. When state and federal laws conflict, employers are legally required to follow the standard that provides the highest level of protection to the young worker.

1. Federal vs. State Hour Restrictions

Strict rules apply to when minors can work. The federal government places tight restrictions on 14- and 15-year-olds to prioritize their schooling. Once a minor turns 16, federal restrictions on the number of hours worked are lifted, though state regulations regarding hazardous occupations still apply. It is a common misconception that 16-year-olds have hour caps; under federal law, they do not.

Age Group	During School Weeks (Federal Rule)	During Summer / Scheduled Breaks
14 and 15 Years Old	Maximum of 3 hours per school day, and 18 hours per school week. Only permitted to work between 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM.	Maximum of 8 hours per day, and 40 hours per week. Permitted to work until 9:00 PM (from June 1 through Labor Day).
16 and 17 Years Old	No federal limits on daily or weekly hours. No federal limits on time of day.	No federal limits on daily or weekly hours. No federal limits on time of day.

The "Youth Minimum Wage" Exception

While the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour, the FLSA includes a specific exception for youth. Employers are legally permitted to pay employees under 20 years old a sub-minimum wage of **\$4.25 per hour** for the first 90 consecutive calendar days of employment. After 90 days, or when the employee turns 20 (whichever comes first), the wage must be raised to at least \$7.25. Always check your first pay stub to verify your hourly rate.

2. Work Permits and the Certification Process

In Georgia, the minimum age for most non-agricultural employment is 14. If you are 14 or 15 years old, you are legally required to obtain an Employment Certificate (commonly called a Work Permit) before you can begin your first day of work. Minors 16 and older no longer need a work permit in Georgia. The process is a joint effort between the student, the school administration, and the prospective employer to ensure the job is safe and legal.

Step 1: Student Initiation

The minor initiates the Work Permit process online via the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) portal. You will enter your personal details and receive a Minor Security Key (MSK).

Step 2: Employer Verification

Provide the MSK to your prospective employer. They will log into the GDOL system, enter the MSK, and detail your job duties and proposed hours to confirm compliance.

Step 3: School Approval

Once the employer completes their section, take your birth certificate to your high school's issuing officer (usually in the counseling office) for final certification.

Exemptions

Minors working for their parents' solely-owned business, acting/performing, or doing casual domestic work (like babysitting or lawn care) are generally exempt from permit rules.

3. Breaks, Meals, and Hazardous Work

A surprising fact of Georgia employment law is that **employers are not legally required to provide rest or meal breaks** to employees of any age. While federal law does not mandate breaks either, it states that if an employer offers short breaks (5 to 20 minutes), they must be paid. Bona fide meal breaks (30 minutes or more) where the employee is completely relieved of duties can be unpaid. Additionally, minors under 18 are strictly prohibited from performing "hazardous occupations," which include operating power-driven meat slicers (common in delis), driving motor vehicles for work, or operating heavy machinery.

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