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Contact: Joan C. Williams, Distinguished Professor of Law & Founding Director,
Center for WorkLife Law
202-365-8013, williams@uchastings.edu

New Report
**Improving Work-Life Fit in Hourly Jobs:
An Underused Cost-Cutting Strategy in a Globalized World**

[Download the full report.](#)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA - The Center for WorkLife Law released a report today that shows widely used techniques for cutting labor costs may, in fact, end up driving labor costs higher. "Just in time" scheduling, which links staffing on a daily or hourly basis to the number of customers or patients present, results in schedules so unstable that expensive turnover and absenteeism result. The report draws on path-breaking research by experts in the field, and provides employers with concrete tools to help them achieve greater "schedule effectiveness" by offering workers schedules that fit better with their family responsibilities.

Hourly employees face two separate problems, the report shows. First, workers with just-in-time schedules lack the basics of schedule stability. Such schedules typically are set only a few days in advance; change from day-to-day and week-to-week; and result in shifts being canceled even after employees report for work. As a result, turnover rates are as high as 500%. Absenteeism also is rampant because work schedules do not fit with employees' family obligations: in one department store, 80% of workers were on probation due to absences. Sky-high turnover and absenteeism are expensive, and jeopardize employers' cost-cutting goals.

The second problem faced by hourly workers is extreme workplace rigidity. Hourly workers lack the flexibility professionals take for granted, to go to a doctor's appointment or stay home with a sick child. Typically, hourly employees have rigid, highly supervised jobs and can be disciplined for being a few minutes late.

The report offers research-based findings to enable employers to redesign just-in-time schedules and increase schedule effectiveness. Research reveals hidden schedule stability in just-in-time environments. A study of a retail chain found that 80% of work hours remained stable from week to week in two-thirds of the stores studied, allowing managers to offer workers both more stable schedules, and more notice of their schedules. The report includes worksheets to help employers uncover hidden schedule stability and calculate turnover. The report also draws on decades of studies to provide employers with a vivid

picture of hourly workers' family lives, and how their family responsibilities interact with work obligations.

In addition, the report provides a comprehensive list of best practices already being used to offer workplace flexibility for hourly workers. Practices range from standard programs such as compressed workweeks and flextime, to less well-known programs such as the ability to take one to three months off without pay (often used by immigrants to visit their home countries), gradual return-to-work policies following childbirth, on-line scheduling systems that allow workers to swap shifts efficiently, and floaters (who may be retired workers) can cover shifts for colleagues unable to work their scheduled hours.

“The irony is that employers' scheduling practices result in absenteeism and turnover so steep that companies are unable to achieve their goal of controlling labor costs,” said study author Joan C. Williams, Founding Director of the Center for WorkLife Law. “This report provides a step-by-step approach to help employers improve schedule effectiveness. The result is bottom-line benefits for employers, and better work-life fit for employees.”

The full report, *Improving Work-Life Fit in Hourly Jobs: An Underused Cost-Cutting Strategy in a Globalized World*, is available at <http://www.worklifelaw.org/pubs/ImprovingWork-LifeFit.pdf>.

The Center for WorkLife Law is a nonprofit research and advocacy group with a unique "six stakeholder" model that reflects the belief that many different stakeholders are ready, willing, and able to play a role in sparking social and organizational change around work-life issues. WorkLife Law works with employees, employers, plaintiffs' employment lawyers, management-side employment lawyers, unions, and public policymakers, to develop effective measures to improve workplace flexibility for employees at all levels. WLL also works with social scientists to spark interdisciplinary studies of bias against caregivers, and works extensively with the press. For more information, visit www.worklifelaw.org.

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