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State Labor Department Director, Consul General of Mexico and Latino Community Leaders Mark Labor Rights Week

Director Joe Costigan Highlights Enforcement of Laws Protecting Workers

CHICAGO—August 23, 2011. Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL) Director Joe Costigan today joined the Consuls General of Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala, Chicago, to publicize Labor Rights Week, organized by the Mexican Consulate to help Latino workers learn more about their rights and protections under state and federal labor laws. Director Costigan emphasized the need for strong enforcement of state labor laws that require workers to receive fair and timely pay.

“As our Department continues to be a critical force in protecting the rights and economic well being of working families in Illinois, we want to make sure that the hard working men and women in our Latino communities know their rights to fair wages and timely payment of earned wages from their employers,” said Dir. Costigan.

Consul General of Mexico Eduardo Arnal, along with the Consul General of El Salvador Patricia Maza-Pittsburg and Consul General of Guatemala Hugo Hun, highlighted the theme for this year’s Labor Rights Week “Women in the Workforce” which will be held from Aug 29 through Sept 2. Other state agencies including the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) and the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) will also participate in events being held in Cicero, Bensenville, South Chicago and Waukegan. IDOL has helped recover wages and protect thousands of Illinois workers through enforcement of the state’s labor laws. Further information is available at www.state.il.us/agency/idol or by calling 312-793-2800.

To underscore the Labor Rights Week’s theme, Dir. Costigan also reminded workers of the Department’s efforts to fight gender-based wage discrimination. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Illinois women still earn just 78 cents of every dollar earned by Illinois men, based on the median weekly earnings of full-time workers. In 2009, Latina women had earnings that were only 90 percent of those of their male counterparts. Since the Illinois Equal Pay Act went into effect in 2004, the Department has received 540 complaints and of the investigations completed so far, has recovered nearly half a million dollars in back wages for workers who did not receive equal pay for equal work.

Under the Illinois Wage Payment and Collection Act, the Department recovered and distributed more than \$1.7 million in final compensation – which includes wages, vacation pay and bonuses owed

to workers – and handled 5,694 complaints in 2010. In 2009, Governor Pat Quinn strengthened the Act to help workers, many of whom survive paycheck to paycheck, recover owed wages more quickly.

Illinois' minimum wage is \$8.25 per hour – \$1 dollar more than the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 – and the Department continues to ensure that workers receive the minimum wage and earned overtime. Last year, the Department recovered \$1.2 million in minimum wage and overtime payments for workers and investigated 1,514 complaints.

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