

Employing Teenagers: What Businesses Need to Know

Article By:

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The current economy has produced a bad job market for teenagers. According to the **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics**, teen employment is at a 37 year low. Across the country, only 17 out of every 100 high school students have jobs. There is high unemployment and stiff competition for jobs among this age group. Still, some employers recognize that employing teens not only benefits the youth by teaching them valuable skills, it also helps to build consumer loyalty for businesses. Employers considering hiring minors must be aware of the special laws governing child labor in Kentucky.

The hours and types of jobs available to workers under the age of 18 are restricted by law. Anyone under the age of 14 is banned from most employment, and students under age 16 cannot work during regularly scheduled school hours. The law also prohibits minors from working in dangerous occupations, such as coal mining, logging, meat packing, and construction. Minors also cannot do work that involves explosives, exposure to radiation, or the use of power-driven machinery or tools. The laws apply to “gainful occupation,” which does not include farm work, domestic services in private homes, or household labor, such as cutting grass. Other exceptions include newspaper delivery and employment of minors by their parents.

Kentucky’s child labor laws are divided into three age groups: children 13 and under; minors age 14-15; and minors 16-17 years old.

- No minor under 14 may work in a “gainful occupation.” Exceptions include school-supervised and sponsored employment programs approved by the Kentucky Department of Education. Minors who are 11 or older may work as golf caddies, subject to certain restrictions. For example, 11 and 12 year olds may not carry golf bags, but they can pull wheeled carts. No caddy under the age of 16 is allowed to drive a motorized golf cart.
- Minors age 14 and 15 are limited to working three hours on school days and eight hours on non school days, with a weekly maximum of 18 hours during the school year. During school breaks, those teens may work up to eight hours a day and 40 hours a week. Work may be performed between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. during most of the year, and from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. between June 1 and Labor Day. No work is allowed during regular school hours.
- 16 and 17 year olds may work six hours a day on school days and eight hours a day on non-school days, for a maximum of 30 hours a week during the school years. Working hours are

limited to 6 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. preceding a school day and to between 6 a.m. and 1 a.m. preceding a non school day during weeks when school is in session.

Unless they are involved in specially approved educational training programs, teenagers must be paid minimum wage and overtime. Also, they are entitled to the same safety and health and non-discrimination protections as adult workers.

Two bills related to child labor have been pre-filed for consideration in the upcoming session of the Kentucky General Assembly. The first one, 14 RS BR 346, would permit minors over the age of 16 to work until 11 p.m. on days preceding a school day. The second, 14 RS BR 344, would amend KRS 339.210 to exclude service as a referee, umpire, or official for a youth athletic program from the definition of “gainful occupation.”

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