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Seattle Expands Hotel Employee Protections Effective July 2020

In September 2019, Seattle City Council voted to adopt a series of ordinances aimed at protecting hotel employees. These ordinances go into effect on **July 1, 2020**. The four separate ordinances include a range of rules that limit the square footage a housekeeping attendant can clean, mandate additional wages to cover health insurance costs, provide panic buttons for certain workers, and provide new regulations for retaining workers after a change in ownership.

Under the “Hotel Employees Safety Protections Ordinance” [[SMC 14.26](#)], a hotel must provide a panic button to each hotel employee assigned to work in a guest room or to deliver items to a guest room. Each hotel must also place a sign on the back of each guest room door titled “The Law Protects Hotel Housekeepers and Other Employees From Violent Assault and Sexual Assault.” The notice must state that the hotel provides panic buttons to all employees assigned to work in guest rooms, in legible font size of no less than 18-point. In addition, a hotel employer must develop a written policy against violent or harassing conduct by the guests and inform guests of this policy before or at the time of guest check-in. The ordinance further requires a hotel employer to take necessary safeguarding steps when it receives an allegation of violent or harassing conduct towards an employee.

The “Protecting Hotel Employees from Injury Ordinance” [[SMC 14.27](#)] limits the workload of hourly employees who clean hotel rooms at “large hotels.” A large hotel is defined as a hotel or motel containing 100 or more guest rooms. Under this ordinance, an employer is prohibited from requiring an employee to clean more than the maximum floor space in a workday that is at least 8 hours. The maximum floor space is defined as 4,500 square feet of guest room floor space. When a hotel employee cleans 10 or more rooms in a workday that is 8 hours or longer, the maximum floor space must then be reduced by 500 square feet for the 10th room cleaning and each cleaning thereafter. If more than one employee performs the room cleaning together, the square footage of the room is divided equally based on the number of employees cleaning the room. If an employee works fewer than 8 hours in a workday, the maximum floor space of 4,500 square feet is prorated according to the actual number of hours the employee spent cleaning rooms. Furthermore, an employee has the right to refuse a request from the hotel to clean more than the maximum floor space, and the employer may not take any adverse action

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against the employee for doing so. If an employee cleans more than the maximum floor space, the employer must pay the employee at least **3 times** the employee's regular rate of pay for the amount of time during the workday the employee spends cleaning rooms that exceed the maximum floor space.

The "Improving Access to Medical Care for Hotel Employees Ordinance" [[SMC 14.28](#)] requires employers to provide certain employees working in hotels with 50 or more employees with increased access to medical care. Employees covered by this ordinance are limited to hourly, non-supervisory employees who work for an average of 80 or more hours per month. Under this ordinance, covered hotel employers must make a monthly payment on behalf of each covered employee as follows and subject to annual adjustments based on the medical inflation rate:

- \$420 per month for an employee with no spouse, domestic partner, or dependents;
- \$714 per month for an employee with only dependents;
- \$840 per month for an employee with only a spouse or domestic partner; and
- \$1,260 per month for an employee with a spouse or domestic partner and one or more dependents.

Lastly, the "Hotel Employees Job Retention Ordinance" [[SMC 14.29](#)] requires employers to take specific actions for hourly, non-supervisory employees when a hotel with 60 or more guest rooms faces a change in ownership. When a hotel changes ownership, the ordinance requires the out-going hotel employer to provide a preferential hiring list to the incoming hotel employer within 15 days after the transfer. The out-going hotel must also post written notice of the change in ownership within 5 business days of the execution of the transfer documents. The incoming hotel employer then must keep the notice posted during any closure of the hotel and for 180 days after the hotel is open to the public under its new control. Further, the incoming hotel must maintain the preferential hiring list and hire from this list by seniority within each job classification for 180 days after the hotel is open to the public under the incoming hotel employer.

Seattle hotels should begin preparing now for the changes these ordinances provide for to ensure they are ahead of schedule and compliant come July 1, 2020. For more information or questions, contact your Stokes Wagner attorney.