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Jobs to Move America Files Lawsuit Against Hyundai and Kia for Using Prison and Child Labor in U.S. Supply Chain

Complaint Alleges Companies Misled California by Certifying Compliance with “High-Road” Labor Standards While Benefiting from Exploitative Practices

Pasadena, CA — November 13, 2025 — Jobs to Move America (JMA), a national nonprofit advocating for good jobs and responsible public investment, today announced the filing of a major lawsuit against Hyundai and Kia for engaging in unconscionable labor practices while falsely certifying to California state and local governments that their vehicles are manufactured in compliance with state and federal law. The lawsuit alleges violations of California’s Unfair Competition Law and is filed against Hyundai Motor America, Inc. (“HMA”), Hyundai Motor Company (“HMC”), Kia America, Inc. (“Kia”), Kia Corporation (“KC”), Hyundai Mobis Co. Ltd. (“Hyundai Mobis”), and Glovis America, LLC (“Glovis”) (collectively described here as Hyundai and Kia).

The complaint, filed in Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles, describes a pattern of abuse and deception that runs contrary to California’s “high-road” labor policies, public purchasing standards, and public values. It details extensive evidence that Hyundai and Kia, despite marketing themselves as socially responsible to California public agencies to secure public contracts, rely on a Southern supply chain that has engaged in illegal and unethical labor practices—including prison labor, coerced migrant labor, and the documented use of child labor—in violation of California law and values. These suppliers, the complaint alleges, operate unsafe workplaces that have led to repeated citations, injuries, and preventable deaths.

“No company should be rewarded with public contracts while violating public values,” said Madeline Janis, Executive Director at Jobs to Move America. “Hyundai and Kia cannot claim to uphold labor standards in California while building their cars using unlawful and abusive practices in the South.”

“No company is above the law— especially companies, like Hyundai and Kia, that are benefitting from public money,” said Meredith Stewart, Litigation Director at Jobs to Move

America. "This case says enough is enough to Hyundai and Kia's persistent refusal to take responsibility for the abhorrent labor practices in their Southern supply chain. Californians— and American workers— deserve better."

California's "high-road" labor standards prohibit goods produced with the benefit of sweatshop, forced, prison, or child labor from being purchased with public money. By certifying compliance with those standards, Hyundai and Kia are misleading California public agencies and consumers, and giving themselves an unfair competitive advantage over responsible companies.

"California public agencies and California cities and counties are major consumers of Hyundai and Kia vehicles. Hyundai and Kia market their vehicles as consistent with California values, but this could not be further from the truth," said Paul More of McCracken, Stemerman & Holsberry.

"Hyundai and Kia falsely present themselves as high-road employers while selling vehicles built by forced prison labor, workers subjected to human trafficking, and children as young as 13-years-old," said Brian Olney, a partner with Hadsell Stormer Renick & Dai. "These corporations' abhorrent and despicable practices must end."

The lawsuit argues that Hyundai and Kia cannot evade responsibility for their suppliers' conduct even as they exercise significant control over how they operate. In Alabama, for example, the use of oppressive incarcerated labor within Hyundai's supply chain was found to depress wages and worsen working conditions for nonincarcerated workers. That information was documented by nationally renowned academics in [The Impact of Incarcerated Labor in Hyundai's Supply Chain](#), released by Columbia Labor Lab last week.

"The State of California and many of its cities and counties have enacted high-road purchasing standards, to ensure that public funds are used responsibly and do not flow to employers who abuse workers and deny their basic rights," said Margo Feinberg of Schwartz, Steinsapir, Dohrmann & Sommers, LLP. "The Defendants' conduct we are challenging in this case flagrantly violates those standards."

JMA's complaint also outlines a broader pattern of denial and deflection, noting that when labor abuses have been exposed, the Hyundai Companies have repeatedly, and falsely, sought to distance themselves from the unlawful and unfair labor practices of their suppliers. The lawsuit contends that the violations are widespread and the companies have the power to stop them.

JMA became aware of these labor practices through its work in the South and redirected significant organizational resources to investigate and address the abuses, consistent with its mission to protect working people, public dollars, and democratic values. Under California's Unfair Competition Law, public interest organizations that must divert resources to combat unlawful conduct have standing to enforce the law in court.

The lawsuit seeks a declaratory judgment that Hyundai and Kia's conduct violates California law and a permanent injunction requiring independent audits, monitoring, and compliance verification.

A press conference on the lawsuit will take place today, Thursday, November 13, 2025, at 10:30 a.m. PT at the Law Offices of Hadsell Stormer located at 128 N. Fair Oaks Ave, Pasadena, CA, 91103. Members of the press are invited to attend via Zoom and can [RSVP here](#).

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About Jobs to Move America

Jobs to Move America (JMA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts rigorous, independent research to develop the ideas, practices, and policies necessary to build a just new economy. For more than a decade, federal, state, and local policymakers have relied on JMA's research to inform their decision-making at the intersection of public procurement and emerging industries. JMA has recently produced leading insights into industries such as electric school bus manufacturing, microchip manufacturing, and lithium extraction.