



## **A Worker First Economic Future For District 8 & Orange County**

### **Union Assurance, Workforce Protection & Healthy Labor Relationships**

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When I speak with residents throughout Meadow Woods, Southchase, Hunters Creek, Wyndham Lakes, Sawgrass, Moss Park, and Lake Nona, I continue hearing the same concerns repeated with increasing urgency. People are exhausted from working harder while feeling like stability continues slipping further away. Families are sacrificing more while affording less. Residents are watching Orange County grow around them while wondering whether they will still be able to afford remaining part of the communities they helped build. The people sustaining Orange County every single day are the same people now carrying the greatest burdens. The workers cleaning hotel rooms before sunrise. The healthcare assistants supporting patients throughout long overnight shifts.

The airport employees handling transportation and logistics behind the scenes. The warehouse workers helping maintain supply chains. The construction workers physically building new infrastructure throughout District 8. The food service employees, janitorial staff, maintenance workers, retail employees, and transportation operators who keep this county functioning every single day. These residents are not asking for luxury. They are asking for stability. They are asking for fairness. They are asking for the ability to live safely and affordably in the same neighborhoods where they work, raise families, worship, and contribute to their communities. Meanwhile, Orange County continues expanding at historic speed. Lake Nona continues attracting global healthcare investment and large scale development. Moss Park and Sawgrass continue experiencing intense growth pressure connected to commercial expansion and infrastructure development. Hunters Creek and Wyndham Lakes continue balancing population growth with concerns regarding traffic congestion, affordability, and long term neighborhood identity. Meadow Woods and Southchase continue carrying affordability pressures that increasingly impact working families already struggling with rising costs. Growth itself is not the enemy. The issue is whether growth benefits the residents already living here or gradually pushes them further away from the communities they helped establish.

*A community cannot call itself successful if the workers sustaining its economy can no longer afford to live within it.*

## **The Current Reality Facing District 8 Workers**

Across Orange County, the cost of housing, insurance, transportation, food, utilities, and childcare continues rising faster than wages for many frontline workers. Hospitality employees, healthcare support staff, airport workers, janitorial employees, warehouse workers, retail employees, and food service workers continue carrying the weight of an

economy that often fails to provide long term stability in return. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, many working adults throughout Orange County now require substantially higher wages simply to maintain basic economic security. At the same time, labor organizations and workforce advocates throughout Central Florida continue reporting staffing shortages, employee burnout, inconsistent scheduling practices, and workforce retention challenges that directly impact both workers and businesses. The truth is simple. When workers are overworked, underpaid, and unsupported, communities become less stable. Businesses experience higher turnover. Families face housing insecurity. Young people begin questioning whether long term opportunity truly exists locally. Longtime residents begin feeling economically displaced from neighborhoods their families helped establish generations ago. Many residents throughout Meadow Woods, Southchase, Wyndham Lakes, Hunters Creek, and surrounding communities are now spending overwhelming portions of their income simply trying to remain housed. That reality creates emotional stress, workforce instability, transportation burdens, increased debt, and growing frustration toward systems people increasingly believe no longer prioritize ordinary working families.

## **Current Efforts Already Helping Workers**

I believe it is important to recognize that several organizations throughout Orange County are already working to improve workforce stability and labor relationships. Organizations like UNITE HERE Local 737 have continued advocating for stronger wages, healthcare protections, scheduling improvements, and worker protections for hospitality employees throughout Central Florida. CareerSource Central Florida continues investing in workforce development programs, career placement initiatives, apprenticeship opportunities, and employment support services designed to help residents gain economic mobility. Valencia College also continues expanding technical

certifications, skilled trades education, healthcare training pipelines, and continuing education programs that remain essential for long term workforce development throughout Orange County. These efforts matter because they demonstrate that worker investment and economic growth are not opposing forces. Strong workers create stronger businesses, stronger neighborhoods, and stronger local economies. However, despite these ongoing efforts, many residents still feel disconnected from available opportunities because accessibility gaps remain too large. Too many workers still do not know where to seek help when facing wage theft, workplace retaliation, labor violations, unsafe working conditions, or barriers to career advancement.

## **My Vision For A Worker First Growth Model**

I do not believe Orange County must choose between economic growth and workforce protection. I believe we are fully capable of accomplishing both. But growth must begin prioritizing people instead of only prioritizing outside investment, corporate expansion, and rapid development. Every major economic decision should answer one simple question. How does this directly improve the lives of the people already living and working here? That means protecting affordability while expanding opportunity. That means strengthening labor relationships while supporting responsible businesses. That means ensuring communities helping build Orange County are not gradually priced out of it. That means recognizing that economic success should not be measured only by luxury development, rising property values, or outside investment totals. True success is measured by whether working families can still afford to remain rooted within the communities they call home.

## **My Workforce Protection Plan**

I want Orange County to establish a Workforce Protection & Labor Rights Center focused specifically on helping frontline workers navigate labor disputes, overtime violations, wage theft claims, workplace retaliation, apprenticeship access, workforce support services, and legal guidance resources. Workers should not need political connections or legal expertise simply to understand their rights and protections. This center would prioritize multilingual outreach and mobile assistance events throughout Meadow Woods, Southchase, Wyndham Lakes, Hunters Creek, Sawgrass, Moss Park, and Lake Nona. Communities deserve systems built around accessibility rather than bureaucratic complexity. Most importantly, this effort can be supported without raising taxes by leveraging workforce grants, educational partnerships, nonprofit collaboration, labor organization partnerships, and existing workforce development funding streams. I also believe major developments receiving county support should provide direct measurable benefits to local residents through Community Workforce Agreements tied to local hiring commitments, apprenticeship opportunities, transportation coordination, workforce housing support, infrastructure readiness planning, and small business participation. If communities absorb the impact of growth, then communities deserve to directly share in the benefits of that growth. I also want to strengthen long term apprenticeship and skilled trades pipelines connecting unions, trade schools, Valencia College, healthcare systems, logistics employers, local businesses, and infrastructure contractors with young adults and working residents seeking long term career stability. Career pathways should include electrical work, healthcare technology, airport logistics, transportation maintenance, clean energy infrastructure, cybersecurity support roles, plumbing, HVAC, construction trades, and public works careers. Not every resident needs a four year degree to achieve success. But every resident deserves access to economic mobility, workforce dignity, and long term opportunity.

# **Rebuilding Public Trust Through Workforce Stability**

I believe Orange County has the opportunity to become a national model for worker focused economic development, labor dignity, responsible growth, and community centered leadership. The future of District 8 cannot be built solely around luxury expansion, outside investment, and rapid development. True progress is measured by whether workers feel protected, whether labor relationships remain healthy, whether young people believe opportunity still exists here, and whether longtime residents can continue affording to remain part of the communities they helped build. The hotel worker in Meadow Woods matters. The healthcare assistant in Lake Nona matters. The warehouse worker in Sawgrass matters. The airport employee in Southchase matters. The construction worker in Moss Park matters. The single parent working multiple jobs in Wyndham Lakes matters. These residents deserve more than survival. They deserve stability, opportunity, fairness, and leadership willing to prioritize the people sustaining Orange County every single day. Because the future of District 8 should never be built around the community. It must be built with the community.

**THIS IS OUR PATH FORWARD.**

## Sources & Current Efforts Referenced

MIT Living Wage Calculator

UNITE HERE Local 737 Reports

National Employment Law Project Wage Theft Research

CareerSource Central Florida Workforce Programs

Valencia College Workforce Development Programs

Orange County Workforce & Economic Development Data

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COMMISSIONER**