

Airlines Scoop Tips from Skycaps

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Boston, MA: Late on a Friday afternoon, Shannon Liss-Riordan is between appointments and looking forward to the weekend. If we talk fast, she has a few minutes to answer questions about a recent certification of an important [Massachusetts employment class action](#) case that could ultimately improve the lives of hundreds of Skycaps that work the at airports across the US.



"Many of these Skycaps have worked in these jobs for 20 or 30 years," says Liss-Riordan. "They are hard-working people that have stuck in these jobs a long time, standing outside the airport in the cold, rain, snow, helping people with their bags."

Liss-Riordan has spent her career working on behalf of low-wage employees, so when a Skycap came to her to five years ago and explained how American Airlines new baggage charge was affecting their incomes, she immediately got the picture.

For years, Skycaps counted on tips to supplement their low wages. But then American Airlines decided to start charging travelers a curbside baggage fee.

"When the airlines started charging two dollars per bag, what they were doing was taking the money that was going to directly to Skycaps," says Liss-Riordan. "Because the charge looked like the tip that customers usually gave to Skycaps—customers thought the two dollars was still going to the Skycaps—like a service charge in a restaurant. But it was really was the airlines taking the money out of the pockets of the workers and diverting it to the Airline's bottom line. I just thought that was atrocious."

In 2008 the courts ordered American Airlines to pay Skycaps \$325,000 in lost tips to a group of nine current and former Skycaps in Massachusetts. "We had poignant testimony at the trial from the plaintiffs," says Liss-Riordan. "They testified they couldn't afford three meals a day after the airlines did this. It was a devastating situation. The money was a drop in the bucket for a company for American Airlines, but it was a huge amount for the Skycaps."

This recent certification of the class action suits means hundreds of American Airlines Skycaps are now in a position to try to recoup hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost income.

"This ruling is exciting because ever since the beginning we have tried to make this a case that would require American to pay back money that skycaps all around the country lost because of this policy," says Liss-Riordan. "Now with this ruling the court has certified our case against American Airlines covering all the skycaps that work at American terminals all across the country at 85 airports."

Liss-Riordan describes the Skycap case as an example of why she decided to law school. "I love class action work on behalf of low wage employees because it is just a great way to be able to make a difference in their lives," she says.

Shannon Liss-Riordan is a Harvard graduate and a name partner in the firm of Lichten & Liss-Riordan. Her practice focuses on class action involving failure to pay wages, overtime, gratuities, minimum wage, and misclassification of employees as independent contractors. Liss-Riordan has won dozens of verdicts and settlements on behalf of employees in discrimination, retaliation and First Amendment violations.