

Produce Industry Wage Dispute

By: Joanna Guzman Jan 17, 2020 / 07:03 PM

MCALLEN, Texas – Wage theft in the produce industry is a growing problem across the Rio Grande Valley, according to a local organization.

Multiple McAllen produce workers are coming forward with allegations, claiming they are forced to work more for less.

The federal minimum wage in Texas is \$7.25, but some McAllen produce workers claim they are getting paid less than half of that.



“We have so many problems and threats,” said Lidia, a produce worker.

A McAllen produce worker, who we’ll be referring to as Lidia, chose to remain anonymous in fear of retaliation from her employer.

Lidia tells us she is constantly being threatened by her boss, if she tells anyone she is working 10 hours a day for 600 dollars a month, that she will get fired.

“She’s not going to give me permission to go to the doctor,” Lidia continued.

Lidia says she is not allowed to take any days off, even if she’s sick. Claiming that she sometimes packs fruit and vegetables while having the flu.

“If we want to use the bathroom we need to go to stripes,” Lidia said.

Lidia alleges the company she works for closed access to the bathroom for employees, claiming that they are now forced to walk 10 minutes to a gas station for a bathroom break.

“In 2019, Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid received over 200 requests for legal assistance for labor abuses from Brownsville to McAllen,” said Kathryn Youker, attorney.

Kathryn Youker, with the Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, said workers who seek legal assistance are often able to recover unpaid wages and other damages.

“We know that in the packing sheds, here in the McAllen terminal in particular, we’ve heard reports of rampant wage thefts, unsafe working conditions. We’ve also heard complaints of sexual harassment,” said Youker.

Valley Interfaith Church Group is now taking action against these allegations.

“Nobody should earn slave wage or work in conditions of slavery,” said

Church members are set to meet with McAllen’s mayor and city manager next week to discuss a possible investigation on produce companies.

They’ll also be asking the city to remove any incentives for companies in violation of the law.

According to the Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, workers have up to three years to retaliate against their former employer for unpaid wages.