



STORY BANK FOR LABOR & COMMERCE COMMITTEE HEARING FEBRUARY 14TH, 2018 | 10:00AM – SPRINGFIELD, IL

BONIFACIO SANDOVAL & MIGUEL GOMEZ, *Worker leaders with Latino Union of Chicago*

An employer told Bonifacio and Miguel that he had bought a new house and that he wanted their help to remodel it. They began working on it every day for 10 hours, from 8 a.m to 6 p.m, for a number of weeks. After the first week, Bonifacio and Miguel weren't paid but they thought, "We don't need to tell him, because he knows that he has to pay us." Every so often, the employer would give them a check, but it was considerably less than what they agreed to. Bonifacio and Miguel didn't want to keep working for him, but the employer would tell them that they had to finish because he had parties or other events coming up. He would come up with a number of excuses for the delay in payment from an aunt dying to waiting for a bonus from another job and now he owes Bonifacio \$6,800 and Miguel \$4,300.

After this theft, Bonifacio didn't have money to pay taxes on his house and, as a result, he lost his house. He also had to pay a lawyer and the stress on his family was tremendous. His spouse thought that he wasn't working because no money was coming in to support them, and the tension grew to the point where they were going to get separated. Meanwhile, Miguel had to use all of his savings to cover his mortgage payments just to make ends meet. The Wage Protection Act - HB4324 is critical for workers like Bonifacio and Miguel who rely on being paid on time and in full because justice delayed is justice denied.

MATTHEW AMANN, *Worker leader with Restaurant Opportunities Center – Chicago*

Matthew got a job at a new restaurant named Ole' Hardwood in the South Loop neighborhood of Chicago. He was impressed by how much attention the restaurant was getting and how much money he was making too. He thought this was an amazing opportunity but would begin noticing red flags when he was at work. He saw the vendors who would show up nearly daily at the restaurant asking for payments. "The owner is just a bit disorganized," he'd think, "Everyone always leaves with a check." He soon found out that they were leaving with cash because checks were bouncing but he wasn't worried either when paychecks bounced, because the owner would show up and pay everyone in cash immediately. Matthew thought, "He made sure to correct the problem right away, he must care about his employees."

Even so, it seemed inevitable when he showed up to work early on New Year's Eve to prepare for a busy night, he found the restaurant boarded up and severely damaged by a fire - a tactic often used in the restaurant industry to disappear an owner's debts and responsibilities. He went to his other coworkers and they all asked where their checks were from the previous pay period, where Matt was owed \$1,000. He tried calling the owner but was met with resistance and then just was ignored altogether.

Matthew later investigated that the same owner had a restaurant in the same location before Ole' Hardwood and it closed under suspicious circumstances. When Matthew contacted previous employees, vendors mentioned they had long written off outstanding debts the previous restaurant owed them. Matthew never received a cent of what he was owed. With the Wage Protection Act – HB4324, Matthew would have been able to file a lien on his employer to have collect the wages that were owed to him.