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STURM COLLEGE OF LAW
Clinical Programs



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Workers Recover \$15,000 in Stolen Wages *Partners Unite to Combat Rampant Wage Theft in Colorado*

Denver, Colorado After working for more than three weeks in the mountain sun, landscaping, installing sprinkler systems, digging, and planting, Abel Saenz walked away with only a small fraction of his pay. His employer refused to pay him for his work, and his family struggled to make ends meet. Mr. Saenz refused to accept this abuse. He contacted Towards Justice, which connected him to University of Denver Sturm College of Law Civil Litigation Clinic. With their help, Mr. Saenz and 3 of his colleagues recovered \$15,000 in stolen wages.

Wage theft is shorthand for a variety of ways that employers nickel and dime employees out of legally earned wages. The Colorado Fiscal Institute estimates that \$750 million in earned wages is stolen from Colorado workers each year. It leaves hard-working families on the brink of poverty, suffering the physical and mental health effects of financial insecurity.

Luckily, strategic collaboration between El Centro Humanitario's Direct Action Team, the Sturm College of Law, Towards Justice, and a growing network of other partners is helping Colorado workers get their stolen wages back. In 2017, Towards Justice partners won judgements or settlements worth over \$750,000 for low-wage workers; the Direct Action Team recovered over \$20,000; and DU's Civil Litigation Clinic recovered over \$16,500. These dollars make a tremendous difference in the lives of vulnerable workers. They also deter future wage theft, support consumer spending, and increase tax revenue. By working together to enforce the wage and hour laws, Colorado partners are empowering workers and stimulating equitable economic growth.

"I am so happy that we could get the money we earned," said Mr. Saenz. "I am also happy to see that we are part of a bigger effort to make the system more fair. But mostly I am grateful to Katie Brown and the DU Civil Litigation Clinic for their work on my case and for believing in me."

"I am honored to support these workers and help enforce wage and hour laws in Colorado. It's also great to be part of a dynamic network supporting our most vulnerable workers," says Denver Law student Katie Brown.

"With over 30 attorneys in our Collaborating Attorneys Network and strong partners like the Direct Action Team and the Civil Litigation Clinic, Towards Justice can help more and more workers connect to justice," explained Towards Justice Executive Director Nina DiSalvo. "The wage theft problem is simply too big to go it alone. But together we can help more workers and put employers on notice that powerful wage and hour enforcers stand ready to help victims of wage theft."

"I am inspired by Abel and his colleagues for standing up for themselves and insisting on justice," said Diego Bleifuss Prados, leader of El Centro's Direct Action Team. "It is their bravery and insistence on justice that makes this all possible."