

Hispanic Affairs Project



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Immigrant Rights are Labor Rights

Grand Junction, May 1, 2017:

During the week of 24 to 28 April, Hispanic Affairs Project in collaboration with Towards Justice - a Colorado non-profit law firm that focuses on combating wage-theft, conducted a series of briefings on that topic and labor laws.

Lindsay Fallon and Justin Grant, Towards Justice representatives, explained that "in Colorado, \$750 million dollars are stolen annually from workers", based on a recent study by the Colorado Fiscal Institute.

Most of the victims are members of minority groups, immigrants, migrants, young students with temporary visits hired to cover the demand in such industries like tourism, hotels, construction, the agricultural sector and factories. But, surprisingly, the perpetrators include major firms and very well established companies. As Victor Hernandez said: "this happens in small businesses, farms and contractors, but also with wealthy people and big business that [have become accustomed to abusing immigrant workers in this way] to increase their profits".

"Although we made an effort to invite the Chamber of Commerce, law enforcement officials, employees of the Judicial District, the Department of Labor, local governments, among other important actors in the community, the absence of some of them was noticeable, and we are concerned that we may not have a conversation about issues [like these] that impact workers and their families. Government entities and [community] organizations are responsible for learning about discrimination and social and economic marginalization, if we want to improve the quality of life in our communities," said Ricardo Pérez, executive director of HAP.

"As an organization working with the immigrant community, we are discovering more and more the lack of laws and regulations where the worker and their families can feel respected and appreciated for their hard work. We are worried that families with full-time jobs live below the poverty level and face problems that have been overcome in most other industrialized countries", said Tom Acker, President of HAP.

The sessions presented by Towards Justice included presentations in English for agencies and community leaders interested in learning more about the subject, but also to train navigators, whose role would be to guide victims in the event of wage abuse, and community leaders in the documentation of cases of wage theft; at the same time, training sessions were also conducted in Spanish to talk to workers and their families. In each community, participants shared their experiences in wage theft, discrimination, labor abuses as acts of the past and the present.

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