

Good afternoon, my name is Romeo Sosa, I'm the Director of Voz: Worker's Education Project. Voz is a worker led organization that empowers immigrants and day laborers to take control over their working conditions.

Day laborers is predominately low-income, Latino males (seventy percent), but there are some women, as well as, naturalized US citizens, Native-Americans, Asians-Americans, and African-Americans. There are between two hundred and three hundred day laborers a day that seek employment in three main locations in Portland. Actually, two are in the street corners, and one is the MLK Jr. Worker Center. All day laborers are seeking honest employment in order to feed themselves and provide for their families. They are fathers, mothers, grandparents, sons and daughters. They left their countries to escape extreme poverty and political violence.

They are movers, landscapers, field workers, gardeners, painters, construction workers, dishwashers, and sometimes as plumbers, electricians, and carpenters.

A day laborer's life is filled with uncertainty. His day begins at five o'clock AM, when he comes to the corner to wait for employment. Some come by bus, some come by bicycle. When they arrive at the corner, anything can happen. There is uncertainty because they may or may not be chosen for work for the day, they don't know what type of work they will be contracted for or if the employer will even pay them. They don't know if they will suffer an accident on the job, most likely unable to access medical care. They don't know if they will be abandoned in an area that does not have access to public transportation, or if they are even allowed to use proper health and safety tools and equipment. It is a life of uncertainty.

A day laborer's life is also filled with civil and labor rights violations. One of the most common abuses of day laborers is wage theft. In the past year alone we have had thirty cases of wage theft amounting to a hundred thousand dollars in unpaid wages. These are only the cases that have been reported to our worker center, but we believe they represent a much larger amount of cases that are never brought to our attention because the abused parties do not believe they have a chance at fair compensation.

The thirty cases we have are all different: bounced checks, employers who pay less than the amount agreed upon or employers who refuse to pay outright; there have even been cases of physical violence against day laborers. A few of our cases are handled by the Bureau of Labor and Industry or BOLI, and the Oregon Law Center. Most of them involve us visiting the employers' houses, their churches, making telephone calls, and writing letters.

#### Case Files:

In one case, the same employer owed sixteen different workers a total of eighteen thousand dollars, a different amount owed to each worker. This employer

contracted the day laborers to paint houses in different areas of Portland, Hillsboro, and Gresham. Most of them were asked to work from eighteen to twenty four hour shifts. At first, the employer paid the workers for the first week of work, and then he informed the workers that he would be switching to a bi-monthly pay schedule. At the end this employer never paid any more to his workers.

One day laborer named Graudenzi Calzada was owed one thousand eight hundred dollars. When he asked for payment, his employer not only refused, but also assaulted Graudenzi by punching him in the face. Graudenzi called the police, but they did nothing but ask for a report of what happened. Voz followed up on this case and it is now being handled by the State Justice Department.

These are the cases that day laborer's face daily in our city. I imagine that the problem is much more serious at a statewide level. Voz is educating workers on their rights and responsibilities on how they can prevent these abuses.

At its root, this problem demands legal reform, and this is in your hands. I am asking you all to vote in favor of the bill. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony.