



Bella Berta Vazquez Jimenez

Member of Unidad Latina en Acción

Resident of New Haven

Testimony in Support of HB 5384 - An Act Concerning the Number of Wage and Hour Inspectors in the Department of Labor

My name is Bella Berta Vazquez Jimenez and I live in New Haven. I support the bill HB 5384 to combat wage theft in Connecticut.

I am part of ULA (Latino Unity in Action) which has approximately 1800 members in the state. Our organization fights for the rights of immigrant workers. We are part of Connecticut For All.

I have been working in construction for about 6 years. **Two years ago, a contractor abused me and 20 other workers.** During the whole time we worked with him, he never paid us overtime and some of us worked 60-73 hours per week.

On top of that, he stopped paying us the final weeks. Also, while we were working, he made me and my coworkers sign a document classifying us as independent workers but we didn't know that.

I became unemployed in the winter season and it is even more difficult for us immigrant workers to get a job. I am a single mother and I have to support my two minor children who depend on me. **Since I did not get paid for several weeks and I did not work for a while, I had to ask for a loan with very high interest that I am still paying today.** It is not fair that the employers steal from us in such a cynical way and that the authorities do nothing.

I went to the Labor Department in Hamden to file a complaint and they told me that they would not take it because I did not have a Social Security number. This Labor Department employee was wrong. We immigrant workers have rights.

We work and pay taxes just like everyone else. Employers who steal from their employees are criminals and should be treated as such. I hope they can increase the number of investigators in the Labor Department and offer training to the current Labor



Department staff so that they know how to take care of all workers regardless of their immigration status.

It's personal for me. We who are at the bottom, our voices aren't heard. Without you, we are powerless. The bosses think they can do whatever they want with us. For an entire year I didn't have enough food.

Enough is enough, we live for a better future. I understand we are many, but **please, put yourself in our shoes as moms, as dads, support us.** I hope that the DOL will quickly expedite our complaint.

Enough of injustice and modern exploitation because that is what we live with as workers. Today you can make real change for workers. Please support HB 5384. I am willing to take any questions you may have. Thank you.