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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Essential Seafood Processing Workers Call for Safe Working Conditions**  
*Urge Companies to Address Crowding and Lack of PPE and Safety Information*

**New Bedford, MA--** Essential seafood processing workers are urging the industry to address overcrowding in plants, inadequate personal protective equipment, poor sanitizing procedures, and a lack of assurances that COVID-19 related leave will be compensated. Starting Monday, workers began delivering and sending letters to over 30 companies calling for them to fix any dangerous conditions and protect public health. The letter, which is supported by Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores, the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health, and Justice at Work, also advocates for workers to receive a \$1/hour pay increase.

“Some people are working so close together they can feel each other breathe. Others have reported not always having soap or paper towels in the bathroom” said a group of workers with Pescando Justicia, a committee that has documented deplorable conditions in fish houses across Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island, including sexual violence, lack of access to basic needs like toilets and drinking water, high rates of injury, and pervasive wage theft. “Workers in this industry are risking everything to keep people fed. They deserve maximum safety precautions, adequate leave, and pay that reflects their sacrifices.”

The workers are calling for health and safety protocols to make sure the industry is not contributing to the spread of the virus, including making sure sick workers do not work and a clearly communicated plan for how the company will adequately respond when a worker tests positive. “The owners of these factories can save the lives of workers and members of the public in general if they fix conditions at their plants right away” said Adrian Ventura, the Director of Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores, a New Bedford-based community and human rights organization that supports Pescando Justicia. “This is about human rights and public health.”

Seafood processing workers supported by the nonprofit legal services organization Justice at Work have also filed a class action lawsuit in Bristol County Superior Court against Workforce Unlimited, an agency known for providing “permatemps” to seafood plants. Filed on behalf of more than 100 workers, the suit seeks recovery of unpaid wages for sick time over a period of at least three years pre-dating COVID-19, as well as additional damages provided for by Massachusetts’ Earned Sick Time law. “I thought as a seafood processor I had to choose between getting paid or going in sick,” said Juan Carlos Carranza, a Workforce Unlimited employee and

member of Pescando Justicia. “Then I found out my employer was breaking the law the whole time. My coworkers and I never should have been forced into those choices -- and no one should be forced into them during the coronavirus outbreak.”

“This case alleges a widespread policy and practice of denying workers sick leave in Massachusetts-based seafood processing facilities” said Attorney Rachel Smit of Fair Work, a law firm partnering with Justice at Work to represent the plaintiffs in the case. “Today, it’s more clear than ever that when workers demand their right to earned sick time, they are standing up not only for themselves and their families but for public health,” she added.

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