

Justice at Work stands in solidarity with the Black community and all those who experience police brutality and the daily effects of systemic anti-Black racism. As unprecedented numbers of people continue to turn out across Massachusetts, the United States and the globe to protest violence against Black people, police brutality, racism, and White supremacy, we look to the leadership of community-led organizations. We hope you will support them and their campaigns: [bit.ly/defundboscops](http://bit.ly/defundboscops). Our longer reflections and paying of respects follow at the end of this newsletter.

## Workers Demand Safety at Seafood Plants & Beyond

### Thank You for Standing with Essential Workers

For weeks after the COVID-19 outbreak began, workers stood shoulder-to-shoulder and unprotected, cleaning and packing scallops, cod, and other seafood in plants along Massachusetts' South Coast. Leaders of Pescando Justicia, a seafood worker committee at Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores (CCT), knew they had to speak out to save lives.



Pescando Justicia Committee Members

With your support and guidance from technical experts at the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health, Justice at Work helped committee leaders write a letter advocating for industry bosses to fix dangerous conditions. The week of April 13th, CCT and Pescando Justicia delivered the letter to over 30 processing companies and temp agencies. Some employers responded to the letter -- and media coverage about the workers' efforts -- by improving social distancing and providing masks.

Meanwhile, CCT and Justice at Work partnered to support workers making COVID19-related

*"I knew from Pescando Justicia leadership training that I had more rights if I didn't deliver the letter alone. I recruited one worker on my line and we found the boss in a meeting with management. The HR person came out to meet us and asked to see the letter. I refused and said it was for the person in charge of the company. [The CEO] then came out. He asked me if it was something to hurt the company. I replied it was something to help us all."*

— Paula de Leon Carrillo, Member, CCT Board of Directors and Pescando Justicia

## Temp Workers Hold Companies Accountable for Sick Leave

CCT member Juana Yac Chach fell ill with COVID-19 in early April. Until then, she had been told by her bosses that no other workers at the seafood plant where she cleans cod had the virus and she should just keep working. But she learned a different story from the health center, which knew of multiple cases originating at the plant and only gave her a test after her supervisor called and told them where she worked. Adding economic harm to illness, neither the company nor Juana's staffing agency paid her sick leave.

On behalf of Juana and thousands of essential

demands in other industries. At one plastics factory where workers delivered their version of the seafood letter to bosses, the plant shut down the next day for deep cleaning and reopened a week later with necessary safeguards in place. In early May the City of New Bedford issued an emergency order that incorporated many of Pescando Justicia's recommendations, instructing all industrial facilities to take the temperature of all workers and visitors, provide workers with health and safety information in their native languages, and notify workers about paid sick and family leave benefits.

workers in the region, Justice at Work pushed the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to enforce the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which provides both paid sick and parental leave during the COVID-19 crisis, against both temporary agencies and host companies that are joint employers. We wrote demand letters to the seafood companies and temp agencies explaining the law and threatening legal action.

In late May, after we filed a complaint with the DOL, Juana finally received her sick pay.

Other workers at the plant report they are also now getting paid two weeks of sick time under FFCRA, and her temp agency has promised authorities to pay one week of extra sick leave and \$1.50 per hour hazard pay to the roughly 1,000 workers it places daily. The DOL also clarified their interpretation of FFCRA for joint employers in their online FAQs, giving temp workers across

the country authority to claim their rightful paid leave. Thank you for making this possible.

**"If you're not accessing your rights, you should seek help. It's unjust that companies are denying people their sick pay when we aren't making enough to begin with."**

— Juana Yac Chach, CCT member

## Legal Resources for Workers & Organizers During COVID-19

### Workers' Rights and Worker Voice During COVID-19 Justice at Work's Annual Summer Organizer Institute

This summer, Justice at Work invites worker center organizers to a virtual training institute on Workers' Rights and Worker Voice During COVID-19. We will focus on new rights under federal law and state safety standards as the economy "reopens," and together strategize and roleplay ways workers can take collective action to demand dignity on the job during this dangerous time. Thank you for making the institute possible for the third year in a row.



The Justice at Work Team this Summer

## Know Your Rights During COVID-19 Monthly Zoom Workshop

Are you scared to go back to work? Has your employer not paid you wages or forced you to work for less than the minimum wage? Have you not been paid your sick time?

Many worker center members answer "yes" to these questions. Your support has enabled Justice at Work to transfer our monthly Spanish language know-your-rights held in East Boston to a Zoom training on workers rights during COVID-19. Last month, 11 people joined us to

learn the current state of the law and raise their concerns, with one group of workers then connecting us to ten of their coworkers. We anticipate bringing five new wage theft cases based on participants' complaints.

## A Moment to Pay Respects

Five days after George Floyd's murder, members of our team were on a call with a group of workers from Central America who described their workplace in a way that we at Justice at Work hear all too often: racially segregated, with workers forced to toil in illegal, undignified conditions. We heard from them that at their pallet recycling job, the "Americans" work inside with air conditioning; fix the pallets already in good condition; have a place to sit and eat their lunch; are paid hourly and receive overtime, vacation, and sick time. The Central American workers, on the other hand, work outside, fixing the pallets that are in the worst condition. They eat lunch outside, sitting on the pallets. They are paid based on production and forced to punch out at noon so the company can avoid any record of their working overtime. They receive no regular vacation, or sick time, and must purchase their own personal protective equipment. And when they've complained, their boss has shouted insults deriding their country of origin and legal status.

These conditions echo those of Black workers like Echol Cole and Robert Walker, who were crushed to death in 1968 by their sanitation truck's hydraulic ram because they weren't allowed to seek shelter from the rain in a White neighborhood in Memphis and a segregationist mayor had refused to pay for fixing their vehicle. In the aftermath of Cole and Walker's deaths, sanitation workers launched their historic "I Am A Man" strike for dignity and respect — and Memphis police shot and killed

sixteen year old Larry Payne, a Black strike supporter and student, even as his hands were raised.

A racialized order based on anti-Blackness has always been, and continues to be, at the core of the U.S. economic system. State-sanctioned violence protects that order, thwarting efforts to challenge the status quo. As we support immigrant workers' demands for dignity within a system still segregated by race and maintained by state violence, we continue to fight for a workers' rights movement that embraces all workers. This means avoiding and redressing the racism of policies like the National Labor Relations Act, which excluded agricultural and domestic workers in order to leave out Black workers. Many laws still perpetuate the legacy of slavery and the marginalization of people of color. It also means deepening our understanding of how anti-Blackness and White supremacy shape every aspect of life and work in the U.S. And it means continuing to support our partners like the Black-led Brazilian Worker Center, and the Brockton Workers' Alliance, with Haitian and Cape Verdean members, and bringing workers together to recognize their common interests and wield their common power. But today, most importantly, we pay our respects to the Black civil rights leaders, workers, and protestors of yesterday and today, and to George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and Rayshard Brooks, whose killings have catalyzed a movement.