

## “We Can Make Unfair Treatment an Issue for the Company” Summer Institute Encourages Food-Chain Workers’ Actions

At Justice at Work’s 3rd annual Summer Organizer Institute, one idea jumped out at Community Organizer Allie Rojas. “Even when there isn’t a legal angle to pursue compensation for workers,” she says, “we can still make unfair treatment an issue for the company.”

In early summer, Rojas, who works for La Comunidad in Everett, MA, began supporting a group of more than 15 workers who’d been told there was no longer work for them at the commercial bakery where some had labored for over a decade. Drawing on lessons learned at our trilingual virtual Organizer Institute, *Workers Rights & Worker Voice During COVID-19*, La Comunidad supported the group of workers in delivering a letter to the bakery demanding a dialogue. “At first, they didn’t believe they would get any response from their former boss,” Rojas said. “Now, they’re having a back-and-forth about what they’re owed. And we’re ready to use tools we practiced at the Institute to publicize the company’s poor treatment of its most loyal employees.”

Joining La Comunidad, staff from ten other organizations attended the Institute, including the Brazilian Worker Center, Brazilian Women’s Group, Brockton Workers’ Alliance, Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores, GreenRoots, Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health (MassCOSH), Massachusetts Jobs with



Thank You for Supporting Food-Chain Workers!

Justice, Matahari Women Workers’ Center, New England United for Justice, and the Pioneer Valley Worker Center. Shortly after, MassCOSH also supported a group of food-chain workers who got sick with COVID-19, were denied paid sick leave owed them under new federal coronavirus leave laws, and were told there was no work available when they returned. MassCOSH invited the workers to Justice at Work’s virtual Know-Your-Workplace-Rights session. They are now receiving legal advice from our partners at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, and MassCOSH helped them lead a direct action at the plant where they worked.

“We’re proud to be organizing around a COVID-19 related sick leave case for the first time,” says Brenda Quintana, MassCOSH Worker Center Organizer. “The pandemic has thrown workers into scenarios none of us imagined a few months ago. The Institute was part of gaining the confidence and knowledge to handle the new kinds of cases we’re seeing.”

## Temp Workers Feed the Country While Fighting Discrimination

Last summer a group of workers came to Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores (CCT) complaining that supervisors shouted sexist slurs, embarrassed female workers, and, in one case, even touched them.

Employed by Blue Harvest Fisheries -- and the temporary staffing agencies the seafood company relies on -- the group also reported that older workers, female workers, and workers from certain countries were treated worse, paid less, and denied the same opportunities for promotion. The group began meeting at CCT to discuss how to speak out, but were scared to take action. Shortly thereafter a large group of workers, some who had worked at the plant for nearly a decade, were abruptly fired.

The workers got support from CCT and Pescando Justicia, a committee of seafood processing workers organizing to win dignified conditions in their industry. They decided to deliver a letter to the companies demanding an explanation. Blue Harvest refused to speak with them and instead called the police. Thanks to your support, the workers responded by filing complaints with the National Labor Relations Board. Blue Harvest and the workers' temp agency were forced to post and mail out a notice to all current and former employees about their organizing rights. Finally, with representation from Justice at Work and Pontikes Law, 12 workers have filed complaints with the Massachusetts Commission Against



Workers Demanding Dignity: Thank You for Your Solidarity

Discrimination. As the complaints move forward, the United States Department of Agriculture has awarded Blue Harvest Fisheries a \$4.4 million grant to supply frozen fish to child nutrition and food assistance programs across the U.S. Thank you for standing with workers as they hold companies that receive government funding, like Blue Harvest, accountable.

*"I was one of the workers at Blue Harvest who was fired after years working there. I'd heard people talk about Pescando Justicia and how a group of attorneys and workers supported other workers. Before this, I thought that because of our need to work we had to stick through whatever and stay quiet. Now I've learned we can't let ourselves get stepped all over. I can defend myself, and I can stand up for someone else when I see that something is wrong."*

- Rebeca Acevedo, Pescando Justicia Leader

## You're Securing Wage Justice During the Pandemic

### Thank You for Fighting Wage Theft During COVID-19

With your support, Justice at Work virtually convened 35 private attorneys, government attorneys, and community partners to raise awareness of workers' wage theft experiences during COVID-19, including the nonpayment of paid sick and parental leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).

Thanks to you, we were able to equip participants with legal information, employee FFCRA-request forms, case intake forms, and a sample civil complaint for violations of the sick time law. Since then, the worker organizations we partner with have used the FFCRA form to help their members request leave, and Segal

Roitman, LLP, agreed to join us in representing a worker who was not paid for sick leave owed under the new federal law. The case recently settled and the worker will soon receive her check. Thank you for making sure workers have legal support as they continue to fight wage theft during this time.

"The Justice at Work convening about workers rights during the pandemic provided invaluable insight into how to address truly unprecedented problems. It gave us the confidence to know there were answers to our questions. That motivated me to support a worker who did not receive FFCRA payments, and we were able to get her a fair amount of backpay that she very much needed." - James A.W. Shaw, Segal Roitman, LLP

## We're Hiring!

### Development and Communications Director or Coordinator

Justice at Work is seeking a Development and Communications Director or Coordinator to work closely with its Executive Director to manage a fundraising and communications strategy that is intertwined with our programmatic work. This is an opportunity to 1) help amplify the power of workers in low-paying jobs through strategic, multilingual communications and resource development, and 2) help leverage the resources of the law and the legal community in support of worker

organizing. The person who fills this position will oversee individual and organizational giving programs, grant fundraising, fundraising events, and organizational storytelling and communications. **We welcome candidates who could grow into this role and share our belief that workers have power, especially when they're taking action together and equipped with resources and support.** Please spread the word! Find our job posting at [www.jatwork.org/join-our-team](http://www.jatwork.org/join-our-team).

JUSTICE AT WORK & DJ HERNAN CHOQUE PRESENT THE

9TH ANNUAL

# Salsa

## FOR JUSTICE

VIRTUAL / ONLINE EVENT

*Dance to Support Workers in Low-Wage Jobs Fighting for Justice*



### Salsa Clásica Vinyl DJ Session – Free!

Sunday, Nov. 15

### Dance Classes

Nov. 16, 17 & 18

### Salsa for Justice — The Main Event

Thursday, Nov. 19

Dance Performances, Music, MC & More

### Schedule & Tickets

at [jatwork.org/salsa-for-justice](https://jatwork.org/salsa-for-justice).

Buy your tickets today to receive your **online access**.



All proceeds benefit Justice at Work, a legal nonprofit supporting workers in low-paying jobs as they seek justice and organize for change.