

Hotel Housekeepers Demand Justice Over Off-the-Clock Work, Stolen Wages

“I have learned to recognize the rights of my coworkers and myself. You have been with me during the process—and now you’ve succeeded in developing my leadership, and making me feel stronger and protected at work.”

—Maritza, MassCOSH member

In the summer of 2020, a group of housekeepers, placed by a staffing agency at a hotel near Logan Airport, went to MassCOSH complaining that their supervisor was bullying them and cutting their hours while increasing their cleaning duties during the pandemic. The workers are housekeepers employed by a staffing agency at a hotel near Logan Airport. When MassCOSH referred them to Justice at Work, we worried this was another case of unjust but sadly legal bullying. Then, at our virtual Know Your Rights workshop, the group realized that their employer was routinely stealing their wages.

They reported their supervisors forced them to work for an hour before allowing them to clock in, and to work without pay through lunch. If the workers didn’t clean 16 rooms per day, they had to punch out and keep working until they finished. Management also routinely stole their tips.

“These workers are an example of how, united and organized with allies like Justice at Work, the fight for better working conditions—safety and fair pay—can be won. *Sí se puede.*”

—Milagros Barreto
MassCOSH Worker Center Director



Two workers, alongside MassCOSH organizers, after delivering a letter with their co-workers to hotel management.

In 2019 the workers sent a letter to the staffing agency’s Chicago headquarters. Instead of addressing the issues, workers report the agency cut their hours. This Fall, supported by MassCOSH and Justice at Work, the group delivered a second letter--this time in person to their managers at the hotel. Now, they are no longer forced to work off the clock or during lunch. The agency has provided partial compensation for prior unpaid lunches. With your support, Justice at Work recruited Segal Roitman, L.L.P., as co-counsel. We’ve filed a lawsuit seeking back wages, overtime, stolen tips, and retaliation damages. The workers are hoping to continue their organizing in parallel with the legal action, as they are committed to winning even better treatment.

“Temp workers at my job site weren’t getting COVID sick pay – so I called the Labor Department”

Your Support as Workers Increase Their Voices Under New Administration

In the summer of 2020, Ruth Castro realized that the temp workers placed at the seafood processing plant where she works were not getting paid for sick time taken due to COVID-19. She immediately called the federal Department of Labor (DOL).

As a member of the Pescando Justicia committee of Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores (CCT), Ruth has participated in years of Justice at Work and CCT leadership training. Even under the Trump administration, she spoke up for her and her coworkers’ rights. Now, she and her peers are ready to increase their voice and power under the new administration. “I know what my rights are and I’m going to continue to speak up,” she says.

Like Ruth, we’re ready to use this moment well. Justice at Work maintained a successful relationship with the federal DOL even under the previous administration. With your support, we pushed the agency to clarify nationally that when temp agencies and host companies like the fish house where Ruth works are considered joint employers, both are responsible for providing COVID-related paid leave. The agency also recently recovered over \$350,000 from restaurants that failed to pay overtime, based on a 2018 referral we made of a MassCOSH member’s case. Now, we’ve teamed up with workers’ rights advocates nationally to articulate workers’ current demands, joining 111 other



Ruth Castro, Pescando Justicia member

organizations in delivering them to the Biden Administration.

Mike Felsen, Justice at Work’s Senior Access to Justice Fellow, has been pivotal to these successes. Felsen spent his career in the regional DOL Solicitor’s Office, and since 2018 has provided our team with strategic insight while nurturing relationships with government personnel. With partnership from him and from you, we aim to strengthen relationships with the DOL and with agencies we stopped meeting with under Trump, like the National Labor Relations Board. We are also using our 4th Annual Summer Institute for Organizers to equip worker organizations with tools for partnering with government to strengthen worker voice on the job. Thank you for helping make this a new era for collective worker power.

“We now have an opportunity to create protections for immigrant workers who speak out. What Congress can’t accomplish, we hope to get done administratively – for example DOL stepping up to grant protections for any undocumented workers who come forward about lawbreaking employers.”

—Jose Palma, Justice at Work Legal & Community Partnerships Coordinator

Construction Workers Build Power With Virtual Leadership Course

In March, we teamed up with the Building Justice Committee of the Brazilian Worker Center (BWC) to launch a Zoom-based leadership course in Spanish for workers in residential construction, cleaning, and building maintenance.

At the first session, 18 people, including members of Centro Presente, La Colaborativa, BWC, MassCOSH, and the Boston Cleaning Collective, got to know one another and share their experiences at work. In upcoming sessions they will learn about their rights, practice negotiating, and take direct action together.

We have previously offered this leadership training in Portuguese only. Thank you for helping us offer it to Spanish-speaking workers for the first time!

“For many years the Brazilian Worker Center has worked with Justice at Work to create a space where workers can move from exploitation on the job to becoming leaders and organizers in raising labor standards. We’re proud to have an impact in Spanish-speaking communities too.”
—Lenita Reason, Brazilian Worker Center Worker's Rights Council Coordinator



March 2021 Building Justice Training

Domestic Worker Wins \$15,000 in Overtime Pay

At the beginning of COVID-19, an affluent couple abruptly fired their nanny “Marta.” For years, she had worked 60+ hours a week taking care of their four children and cleaning their house. They had never once paid her overtime.

Last winter, “Marta” approached the Matahari Women Workers' Center during their Our Work, Our Worth campaign, which focused on supporting immigrant domestic workers with wage claims during COVID. Justice at Work drafted a letter for Matahari to send to her employers demanding

immediate payment of owed overtime wages. The employers complied and paid her almost \$15,000. Thank you for supporting “Marta” and her worker center in asserting domestic workers’ rights to overtime wages and fair compensation.

“‘Marta’ not only came forward to get her wages, but also powerfully told her story to hundreds of immigrant women workers, helping to inspire others to come forward to demand pay and dignity.”
—Julia Beebe, Matahari Organizer

Join Justice at Work in Celebrating 10 Years!



Join us!

10TH ANNUAL CELEBRATION
& 2021 SOLIDARITY AWARDS

Honoring
**EDGAR PEREA &
BRIAN FLYNN (1958-2020)**

Thursday, May 6
7:30pm to 8:30pm EST

Virtual Event (via Zoom)

Buy your tickets at www.jatwork.org/10th-annual

Staff

Pablo Carrasco, Staff Attorney
José Palma, Community and Legal Partnerships Coordinator
Connie Rab, Development and Communications Coordinator
Thomas Smith, Executive Director

Board of Directors

Alexandre Galimberti, Bryan Gangemi, Julio Henriquez, Carol Mallory,
Elizabeth Matos, Elvis Mendez, Sharmila Murthy, Ingrid Nava

