



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

State Senator Gustavo Rivera and Assembly Member Victor M. Pichardo Host Workers' Rights Forum

GUSTAVO RIVERA August 25, 2015

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Liberato Workers Leverage their Experience to Empower Bronxites to Fight Against Wage Theft And Harassment

(Bronx, NY) - Today, State Senator Gustavo Rivera and Assembly Member Victor Pichardo were joined by a group of workers from Liberato Restaurant, city agencies and non-profit organizations to engage and inform workers in the community about their rights and the mechanisms available to them to enforce those rights. This forum is in response to a growing number of constituents reporting alleged violations of the New York State Minimum Wage and Overtime Laws, as well as violations of the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act, in their places of work.

"No worker should have to tolerate wage theft or any form of harassment while trying to earn a living to support themselves and their families. It is our responsibility as government officials to provide workers who find themselves in these situations with the support, information and resources they need to ensure their rights are protected and our labor laws are enforced," **said State Senator Gustavo Rivera**. "Today, we came together to not only empower workers to take a stand against illegal labor practices, but also to send a clear message to employers that we will not tolerate the violations of labor laws or the mistreatment of our workers."

"My neighbors deserve to earn a living in a workplace that respects their rights as individuals and employees," **said Assembly Member Victor M. Pichardo**. "Today, we were able to educate workers on their rights and show them that government is on their side. We will not tolerate businesses that circumvent the law to enrich themselves and hinder the rights of their employees."

The forum highlighted the experiences of workers from Liberato Restaurant in the West Bronx as an example of what other workers in similar situations can do to fight and overcome illegal labor practices. During the panel, the Liberato workers touched on the challenges they faced, which include alleged wage theft and sexual harassment, as well as the tactics they implemented to wage a legal and grassroots campaign for their rights as workers. For over a year, the Liberato workers, with the assistance of the Laundry Workers Center, have organized and filed a series of lawsuits against the owner of the restaurant.

"Together as a community we can change the culture of wage theft, we must educate ourselves to improve our workplaces," **said Maggy Andres, member of the Laundry Workers Center**.

The Office of the New York City Comptroller, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Unit, the Legal Aid Society, and the New Immigrant Community Empowerment also participated in the panel and provided workers with information regarding their legal rights and the resources at their disposal throughout the various state and city agencies to enforce their rights as workers to organize and fight against wage theft and retaliation.

"Wage theft and other violations of workers' rights remain all too prevalent, particularly among low-wage immigrant workers. We are happy to participate in this event organized by State Senator Rivera and Assembly Member Pichardo to draw attention to these issues, raise awareness among workers, and help connect impacted workers with additional resources and referrals. When workers' rights are upheld, families and communities are better able to thrive," **said Commissioner Nisha Agarwal, NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.**

"The Legal Aid Society's Employment Law Unit is dedicated to protecting the rights of low-income workers in New York City. We have brought groundbreaking cases to enforce the rights of nail salon workers, restaurant delivery workers and domestic workers. Legal Aid is pleased to be working with State Senator Gustavo Rivera and Assembly Member Victor Pichardo to continue to educate low-wage workers about their rights," **said Karen Cacace, Legal Aid Society.**

"Events like these are very important because they help workers open their eyes and learn that they do not have to be afraid. Workers should know their rights and should be provided information about those rights. Also, they should know that they are not alone and that there are organizations they can go to for help when they are facing these types of problems. I thank the Senator and Assemblymember for their time and interest in helping workers and immigrants, and for organizing events as this one that allow workers to learn about their rights and know that they have the support of city and state agencies," **said Oswaldo Mendoza of the New Immigrant Community Empowerment.**

In response to the Liberato workers efforts, the owner of the restaurant allegedly retaliated against them by threatening and firing a number of workers. To help those affected workers, the Laundry Workers Center is currently spearheading a fundraising campaign under their LWC Solidarity Fund, which will help cover the fired Liberato workers' basic living expenses and legal costs. To learn more about the campaign or to contribute, click on the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/liberatoworkers>