

RIGHTS & WAGE THEFT

May Day rally

Somos Gallup; workers protest for May Day

By Kyle Chancellor

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GALLUP — Dozens of workers, and those who support them, rallied outside the McKinley County Courthouse Monday to raise their voices on worker's rights. Demonstrators gathered outside just off the courthouse steps Monday evening holding signs in both English and Spanish. The signs read, "Stop Separating Families," "Santa Fe Somos Familia," "Trump Trump Deja En Paz a Nuestra Familia," and "ICE Out of Courts and Probation."

While the signs were mainly in response to increased pressure from the Trump administration to deport immigrants living in the U.S., the conversation during the rally focused more on worker's rights, especially wage theft in McKinley county.

"We need our government to help make our lives better, not worse," ose_na Rebollo, a member of Somos Gallup, said. "Finding a job is hard enough in McKinley County, not getting paid all the hours worked makes life harder for not only my family but our entire community."

Elsa Lopez, of Somos Gallup who organized the rally, and Emerson Toledo, of the McKinley County Health Alliance presented a recent study titled, Two Groups, One Community; The Impact of Wage Theft and Other Employment Violations on the Native American and Latino Workers in Gallup.

The study, a rst of its kind according to Lopez, looked at the

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Sister Lyliana Ricaud, left and Mother Magda Garcia from Casa Reina hold signs and cheer in support of the May Day rally in support of immigrants held at the courthouse square in downtown Gallup Monday.

Cayla Nimmo/Independent



Anna Rondon, top right, from New Mexico Social Justice Equity Institute speaks at the immigrant rally held at the courthouse square in downtown Gallup Monday.

Cayla Nimmo/Independent

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experience of 50 workers from McKinley County; 25 Latino Immigrants and 25 Native Americans. The results of the study show that wage theft is a pervasive issue, with 70 percent of the polled workers reporting some sort of wage theft. Sixteen percent reported experiencing more than two forms of wage theft.

Wage theft is when workers are paid less than minimum wage, not paid their last pay check, forced to work off the clock or not paid for overtime.

“It’s basically racism and discrimination how they can make money off the sweat of these workers,” Anna Randon with the McKinley Collaborative for Health Equity said.

“Up with workers! Down with wage theft! Stupid wage theft!” chanted the crowd, led by Lopez.

Workplace discrimination prevalent

The study also showed that while Latino immigrants experienced wage theft at a slightly higher rate than the Native American respondents, both groups reported they had experienced workplace discrimination at similar levels; about 48 percent.

“When workers are not paid fairly or not at all, workers and their families are not the only ones impacted. The entire community is also cheated,” Randon said.

Lopez said workers in the area have historically not reported wage theft to the proper authorities either because they didn’t know how, or they feared retaliation from their employers.

But, Lopez and Rosa Rebollos, also with Somos Gallup, said over the past six years, the organization has helped educate both Latino workers, Native American workers, as well as employers about workers’ rights and what workers can do if they feel those rights have been violated.

Part of the issue is an obvious language barrier between the mainly Spanish-speaking Latino workers and the state departments that can help them. Access to the departments is also lacking, Lopez said, which adds to the problem.

Lopez said they have helped three workers file complaints with the state Department of Workforce Solutions, and they have a fourth person who has come forward to file an official complaint.

Lopez said the real goal of Somos Gallup is to educate and share information on the rights of workers to those locally who may be effected, in order to better the lives of the workers, and in turn, improve the community in which we all live.

The report distributed by the group can be see in its entirety online.

Information: SomosUnPuebloUnido.org the parent organization for Somos Gallup.



A crowd gathers carrying signs and banners in support of the immigrant rally Monday at the courthouse square in Gallup.

Cayla Nimmo/Independent