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Feds offer helping hand to Morris day workers

Wind of the Spirit, government target issues about pay

BY MINHAJ HASSAN
DAILY RECORD

MORRISTOWN -- The Department of Labor signed a formal agreement Thursday with the Wind of the Spirit immigrant resource center that will help the center assist immigrant workers who might be getting shortchanged by contractors that employ them.

"We are very pleased today to sign a formal agreement (with Wind of the Spirit)," said Joseph Petrecca, regional director for the Wage and Hour Division of the Labor Department in Mountainside, during a press conference at the immigrant group's Market Street headquarters. "It is a long time in the making."

He said the agency's goal is to ensure workers are being paid minimum wage and overtime when appropriate, as the Fair Labor Standards Act dictates.

The partnership will allow the department to bolster its outreach efforts to advocacy groups who help immigrant workers.

Too often, Petrecca said, immigrant workers fear government and choose to only tell people, such as their minister, about problems with work. However, he said, the government plays a vital role in making sure people are paid appropriately, regardless of immigration status.

"We don't make a distinction about who the employees are," Petrecca said.

Petrecca hopes the department and Wind of the Spirit officials will meet regularly to discuss various issues, although a specific number was not available.

"We want to make ourselves accessible to the working public," he said.

Wind of the Spirit officials Diana Mejia and Stuart Sydenstricker were on board to sign the agreement. Both described the occasion as an historic moment.

"There's hope in the community," Mejia said. "We really, really thank you."

Sydenstricker said that, through various sources, \$100,000 in unpaid wages has been recouped.

Petrecca said contractors could be fined if cases of exploitation are discovered.



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Diana Mejia of The Wind of the Spirit immigrant resource center signs a labor alliance with Joseph Petrecca, district director for the Department of Labor. The deal will protect Morristown's day laborers from low-paying employers through the federal government.



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Stewart Sydenstricker of The Wind of the Spirit immigrant resource center signs the labor alliance, which gives Morristown workers federal protection from low-paying employers

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