

PRESS RELEASE  
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Contact:

Marcela Díaz  
505-424-7832  
Executive Director  
Somos un Pueblo Unido

Norma Moreno  
505-424-7832  
Somos un Pueblo Unido

### **Governor Signs Law to Protect New Mexico's Workers from Wage Theft**

SANTA FE - Today Governor Bill Richardson signed House Bill 489 sponsored by Representative Miguel García (Dist. 14-Bernalillo). House Bill 489 provides stronger protections for workers who file claims for unpaid wages and overtime and penalizes the employers who steal from them.

*Somos Un Pueblo Unido*, a statewide immigrants' rights organization, spearheaded the campaign to pass the law with support from labor and faith organizations throughout New Mexico.

"Too many employers were getting away with stealing wages from New Mexico's workers," said Marcela Díaz, Director of *Somos*. "This law will make it easier for aggrieved workers to recuperate their wages, an important gain especially during these hard economic times."

"New Mexico is protecting workers from employers who deny them their hard-earned money," said Representative García. "This was one of the few bills to protect blue collar workers that got to the Governor's desk. I'm so pleased and proud he signed it."

Specifically HB 489 would:

1. Make it illegal for employers to discharge or discriminate against any person in retaliation for asserting their right to unpaid wages, for assisting any other person in doing so or for informing any person about their rights.
2. Extend the statute of limitation for wage claims from one year to three years to file a claim and give workers the ability to recuperate all wages stolen from them, if they can prove it.
3. Penalize employers and deter them from stealing wages from their workers by making them liable for treble (triple) damages plus interest for unpaid or under paid wages.
4. Allow the courts to order injunctive relief including requiring an employer to post a notice describing wage violations so other employees will know they have the right to claim unpaid wages.

"This law not only benefits workers, but also levels the playing field between honest employers and dishonest ones who cut costs by stealing wages," explained Brandt Milstein, a Santa Fe based labor attorney working with *Somos* on the bill.

During the last ten years, *Somos* has documented hundreds of wage theft abuses in the immigrant community. Last year alone, the Department of Workforce Solutions Labor Relations Division investigated over 2,400 wage claims from immigrant and non immigrant workers.

"The passage of this law sends a strong message to those employers who think they can take advantage of their workers," said Rayos Burciaga, a housekeeper and *Somos*' board member. "Now bad employers will think twice about cheating their employees out of their paycheck."

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