MONTH-TO-MONTH FUNDING AND D.C. LITIGATION

The Latest Federal Attacks Against CRLA

Part of the on-going Legal Service Corporation (LSC) Inspector General investigation initiated by Congressman Devin Nunes and the Dairy Industry is now pending in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. This is the third investigation in recent years initiated by dairy farmers, some of whom are the target of claims successfully filed by CRLA for unpaid wages and unlawful working conditions. CRLA invited the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to seek a subpoena after the OIG unsuccessfully tried to pressure the LSC to suspend CRLA funding over this issue. CRLA receives nearly $7 million from LSC funding.

In March 2006, the dispute began when the OIG sought production of confidential personal information concerning some 39,000 indigent clients for whom CRLA opened files during a 33-month period. CRLA objected that this information is protected as confidential under federal and state law. The American Bar Association issued a letter last year supporting CRLA’s position. CRLA refuses the demand because the risk of divulging client identities and data to the public will not only discourage future clients from seeking assistance, but will jeopardize the security of thousands of current or recent clients. CRLA’s rural poor clients seek legal help on highly sensitive and confidential issues such as domestic violence, landlord abuse and failure of their employers to pay farm workers for hours of arduous work. These clients are fearful of retaliation if adversaries know their identities when they seek legal advice.

Throughout, the OIG has refused to articulate any rational need for the information or discuss any way to acquire it more efficiently. When asked the purpose of the massive inquiry, OIG refuses to provide any rationale other than saying they have the power to obtain the information and have no need to state any reason. Nor has OIG been willing to enter into any binding agreement that sensitive client information sent to it will remain confidential and not be passed on to others. The OIG has also stated that more information is needed to find out if CRLA “disproportionately focuses its resources on farm worker and Latino work,” matters which are neither regulated nor prohibited.

CRLA Client Gives Back

Mr. Adrian Juarez is a shining example of a generous CRLA donor, but yet he arrived at CRLA’s Oxnard Office as a client in need of legal assistance. Mr. Juarez was fired from his position as a mechanic at a landscaping and irrigation company because he asked for a raise. Not only did Adrian unfairly lose his job after this mere inquiry, but he also lost $300.00 of wages for hours he had already worked.

CRLA filed his case with the Labor Commission for the $300.00 unpaid wages and seeking penalties under Labor Code 226.7 (which prohibits employers from requiring employees to work during meal periods) and Code 203 (which prohibits an employer from intentionally withholding wages from an employee when those wages are due). The Labor Commission Office granted CRLA a favorable decision and Mr. Juarez’s employer not only sent a check for $300.00 but he was also forced to pay penalties under LC 226.7 & LC 203 for a total of $6,657.42.

Mr. Juarez later returned to CRLA’s Oxnard office and presented one of CRLA’s community workers with a check for $1,000.00 and said “You have showed me that there are always doors that can be opened. I couldn’t leave without showing you my gratitude with this small donation.” It is a rare and special moment for CRLA when we receive this great generosity from one of our own low-income clients like Adrian. CRLA would like to thank Mr. Juarez for his charitable effort to ensure that other individuals like him can have the same opportunity to defend themselves against inequality.

CRLA IS LAUNCHING A NEW WEBSITE

We are very pleased to report that we will be launching our new website this Spring! Please visit www.crla.org and learn about the services and resources that we offer and how you can get involved to help California’s rural poor.
due to impending 2010 deadlines, the issue has taken on new urgency. Through the AgJOBS Act, farm workers will be granted a legal pathway to permanent residence in the United States, along with their dependents, if they meet certain requirements. The key eligibility criterion is five years of continuous agricultural work. The Farm Work Force Reform Act is another immigration bill which proposes a vastly different approach; it would allow employers to sponsor H-2A visas for temporary agricultural workers. A comprehensive immigration reform bill would need to be comprehensive. The savings derived from immigration reform must be generated over the long term, not in the short term, so the fiscal impact must be significant. Therefore, it is unlikely that the federal government will implement any major immigration reform initiative without a significant economic stimulus package.

CRLA Client Gives Back

Mr. Adrian Juarez is a shining example of a generous CRLA client. In 1997, Mr. Juarez was hired by a landscaping and irrigation company as a mechanic at a landscaping and irrigation company because he lacked the proper documentation to work. He performed a specific amount of agricultural work after the law was passed.

Living Under the Trees

David Bacon is a renowned photographer of immigrant and farm worker communities in California. His recent project in collaboration with CRLA is titled “Living Under the Trees” and is a combination of photography and oral histories that document indigenous farm worker communities in rural California, and those scattered on the edges of cities from San Diego to Santa Cruz.

CRLA filed a civil action against the grower and settled the case for over $125,000 exactly one year after the case was filed. Most of the workers stood to receive in excess of twice the wages that they were owed in them.

Despite the delay in receiving their pay, the farm workers tended throughout the harvest, sometimes seventy hours per week, relying on assurances that they would be paid the money that was owed to them on Thanksgiving. Yet Thanksgiving came and went and the workers had not received any money for nearly 900 hours of labor.

Soon after Thanksgiving, the laborers contacted CRLA to represent them in the matter. The grower stipulated CRLA’s request to obtain the matter without litigation. CRLA filed a civil action against the grower and settled the case for over $125,000 exactly one year after the case was filed. Most of the workers stood to receive in excess of twice the wages that they were owed in them.

CRLA Client Gives Back

Mr. Adrian Juarez is a shining example of a generous CRLA client. In 1997, Mr. Juarez was hired by a landscaping and irrigation company because he lacked the proper documentation to work. He performed a specific amount of agricultural work after the law was passed.

Living Under the Trees

David Bacon is a renowned photographer of immigrant and farm worker communities in California. His recent project in collaboration with CRLA is titled “Living Under the Trees” and is a combination of photography and oral histories that document indigenous farm worker communities in rural California, and those scattered on the edges of cities from San Diego to Santa Cruz.

CRLA filed a civil action against the grower and settled the case for over $125,000 exactly one year after the case was filed. Most of the workers stood to receive in excess of twice the wages that they were owed in them.

Despite the delay in receiving their pay, the farm workers tended throughout the harvest, sometimes seventy hours per week, relying on assurances that they would be paid the money that was owed to them on Thanksgiving. Yet Thanksgiving came and went and the workers had not received any money for nearly 900 hours of labor.

Soon after Thanksgiving, the laborers contacted CRLA to represent them in the matter. The grower stipulated CRLA’s request to obtain the matter without litigation. CRLA filed a civil action against the grower and settled the case for over $125,000 exactly one year after the case was filed. Most of the workers stood to receive in excess of twice the wages that they were owed in them.

CRLA Client Gives Back

Mr. Adrian Juarez is a shining example of a generous CRLA client. In 1997, Mr. Juarez was hired by a landscaping and irrigation company because he lacked the proper documentation to work. He performed a specific amount of agricultural work after the law was passed.

Living Under the Trees

David Bacon is a renowned photographer of immigrant and farm worker communities in California. His recent project in collaboration with CRLA is titled “Living Under the Trees” and is a combination of photography and oral histories that document indigenous farm worker communities in rural California, and those scattered on the edges of cities from San Diego to Santa Cruz.

CRLA filed a civil action against the grower and settled the case for over $125,000 exactly one year after the case was filed. Most of the workers stood to receive in excess of twice the wages that they were owed in them.

Despite the delay in receiving their pay, the farm workers tended throughout the harvest, sometimes seventy hours per week, relying on assurances that they would be paid the money that was owed to them on Thanksgiving. Yet Thanksgiving came and went and the workers had not received any money for nearly 900 hours of labor.

Soon after Thanksgiving, the laborers contacted CRLA to represent them in the matter. The grower stipulated CRLA’s request to obtain the matter without litigation. CRLA filed a civil action against the grower and settled the case for over $125,000 exactly one year after the case was filed. Most of the workers stood to receive in excess of twice the wages that they were owed in them.