

## IMMIGRANT WORKERS ALLEGE FORCED LABOR IN WAL-MART SUPPLIER CHAIN



Immigrant workers, from Mexico, in the country on H-2B work visas have alleged that CJ's Seafood of Louisiana was violating supplier standards and that they were being forced to work under ruthless work conditions. The workers have gone on strike and have even compiled more than 130,000 signatures asking Wal-Mart to withdraw its contract with the Louisiana-based seafood company. Led by worker Ana Rosa Díaz, the workers have made serious claims of being made to work for as long as twenty four hours, of not being given any overtime pay, of being locked within the facility to prevent them from escaping and even being threatened with physical violence, including being beaten up with a shovel, if they wanted to take breaks. Guestworker Rosendo Castillo, 52, said, "Once when I was getting my pay check, the boss showed me that he had a gun in his desk. I think he wanted me to know that he was armed because I'm the kind of person that stands up for my rights." "We were forced to work 15- to 24-hour shifts and we were threatened with violence when we tried to take breaks," Rosa Díaz said in a press release from Change.org. "Our boss threatened us and our families and we went on strike to demand safety and basic rights. But our boss refused, so now we're taking our demands to Wal-Mart." Change.org released a video proving that the workers did give a list of their demands to the company's finance executive Mike Leblanc, who when noticing that a camera was recording the proceedings, shouted at them to turn the camera off. He can be heard screaming on the video, "Y'all are not going to screw up over and start interrogating me." The U.S. Department of Labor is investigating the alleged abuses. On Wednesday, the labor rights monitoring organization the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) confirmed the worker claims in a report. The WRC has also asked Wal-Mart to abandon the seafood company's business, until they insure that such infringements do not recur. Jennifer J. Rosenbaum of the National Guestworkers Alliance in a complaint to the Labor Department wrote, "CJ's Seafood has engaged in extremely coercive employment related actions, including forcing guestworkers to work up to 24-hour shifts with no overtime pay, locking guestworkers in the plant to force them to continue to work, threatening the guestworkers with beatings to make them work faster, and threatening violence against the guestworkers' families in Mexico after workers contacted law enforcement for assistance." The immigrant workers were living on a nearby labor camp. All their movements were monitored and they had to report to the owners when they wanted to leave. "As soon as we received reports of potential violation of our ethical sourcing policy we launched an investigation," said Megan Murphy, international corporate affairs manager for Wal-Mart, according to the International Business Times. "We take reports like this very seriously and we will take appropriate actions based on the findings from our investigation." This is not the first time Wal-Mart has faced allegations regarding immigrants in their workforce. In 2005 they have paid \$11 million to settle federal probe into its use of undocumented immigrants as janitors. Allegations have included derogatory language at the workplace, unfair promotion practices and pay discrimination. Nearly 2,000 women in 48 states filed charges against Wal-Mart to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accusing the company of sex discrimination. "We are satisfied that this is being settled as a civil matter," Wal-Mart spokeswoman Mona Williams said at the time. "Despite a long, thorough and high-profile investigation, the government has not charged anyone at Wal-Mart with wrongdoing." "These types of threats are common to all types of guestworkers," Rosa Díaz said. "But there are few people who will stand up and say things about them."