



Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Ministry of Unpaid Labour; Local workers owed wages but have no hopes the Ministry will do its job

Five local workers are collectively owed \$15,878.62 in unpaid wages, but they have yet to see any of the money despite the Ministry of Labour issuing Orders to Pay against their employer.

The Ministry of Labour issued Orders to Pay against a Belleville company named Water's Edge Retirement Living Limited ("Water's Edge") in September 2009 for not paying its employees their regular wages, overtime pay, public holiday pay, vacation pay, and termination pay. The Ministry of Labour also found that Water's Edge fired one of its employees for asserting her rights under the *Employment Standards Act*.

Despite the Orders to Pay, the Ministry of Labour has yet to recover any of the unpaid wages. Amanda Cooney and Kathy Gallinger, two of the former Water's Edge employees who are owed \$4,429.10 and \$910.98 respectively, feel disillusioned with the Ministry of Labour's inability to protect Ontario workers. They initially filed their claims with the Ministry of Labour because they felt that the government would be able to collect their wages owing. "I now don't have faith that I will ever see the money because it has been so long," Gallinger said.

Unfortunately, the five workers' experiences are not uncommon. "Enforcement of employment standards is sorely lacking in Ontario. According to the latest figures from 2001-2006, the Ministry of Labour ordered employers to pay approximately \$169 million to Ontario workers. Out of that \$169 million of unpaid wages, the Ministry failed to collect approximately \$100 million," stated John No, an employment law lawyer with the Belleville based Community Advocacy & Legal Centre (CALC).

Sonia Singh of the Workers' Action Centre in Toronto also expressed concerns about the Ministry of Labour's enforcement of the *Employment Standards Act*. "We often meet workers who filed claims with the Ministry but then never see a cent of their wages owing. Unfortunately, this means that a lot of employers think that they can get away with breaking basic employment standards."

For further information about the contents of this press release, please call Michele Leering at 613-966-8686, ext 27 or Toll Free at 1-877-966-8686.

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Deirdre McDade, a lawyer with CALC, nevertheless stressed the importance of workers filing claims with the Ministry of Labour despite the inadequate enforcement. “Many workers do recover their wages. It is also important to file claims in order to let the government be aware of the problems that Ontario workers face.”

Low income workers who qualify for legal aid services can also contact CALC for advice on employment standards, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board matters, and human rights.

The Community Advocacy & Legal Centre (CALC) is a non-profit community legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. The clinic was founded in 1980 and is currently staffed by lawyers, community legal workers, law clerks and support staff. We serve low income residents of Hastings, Prince Edward and Lennox & Addington counties. Our main office is in Belleville, with satellite locations in Trenton, Picton, Napanee, Bancroft and Madoc.

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