

08-06-2010 Filipino teachers file class suit vs oppressive recruiters

Partido ng Manggagawa (PM)
 Filipino Educators Federation (FEF) – Louisiana
 Joint Press Release
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Hundreds of Filipino migrant teachers who are working under H1-B visa and are deployed in several school districts in Louisiana are represented in the class action lawsuit. The plaintiffs are spearheaded by the Filipino Educators Federation (FEF) of Louisiana, a group formed to organize the victims of the recruitment agencies and pursue efforts against these same agencies.

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Also named as respondents in the complaint are Lourdes “Lulu” Navarro and Hothello “Jack” Navarro of UPI, Emilio Villarba of PARS International; UPI’s law firm Silverman and Associates and lawyer Robert Silverman; and the East Baton Rouge School District and three of its former and one current officers.

The lawsuit arose from the illegal and highly exorbitant amount that were charged to the Filipino teachers. The recruitment agencies were never transparent and always seemed to come up with additional payments. When teachers attempt to complain or question the policies of the agency they were threatened to be sued or fired or deported back to the Philippines. Aside from the illegal charges, the teachers were intimidated to sign lopsided contracts.

During a press conference held to announce the filing of the suit, a press statement was read by Ingrid Jomento-Cruz, FEF President. “We never imagined that an oppressive racketeering trap was laid before us. Universal Placement International or UPI and its Philippine-based conduit, PARS International, created a non-transparent scheme that starts with earning your trust, then proceeds with a series of payment collection laced with subtle intimidation and then followed through with fraud, coercion and open extortion. We were herded onto a path, a slowly constricting path, where the moment you realize that something is not right, you were already way past the point of no return.”

“This oppressive scheme of UPI and PARS wouldn’t have been totally successful without the knowledge, tolerance and support from individuals who acted on behalf of the School System. We cannot deny the fact that they cooperated with the recruiters or failed to object to actions that they knew were highly questionable if not downright illegal.”

While the East Baton Rouge School District was named as one of the respondents, Jomento-Cruz underscored that they have no animosity against their current employer. “We would like to make it clear that we harbor no ill will towards the Louisiana School System… The new superintendent has paid attention to our concerns and has closely monitored the problems we have encountered… Let me also use this opportunity to declare once again that we continue to have a strong commitment to our students, and will continue to serve the district for we believe that the actions by some individuals within the EBR School District do not represent the values of the institution and the people of Louisiana.”

“The exploitation of migrant workers is an ongoing and a growing problem here in the US. This lawsuit is again another arena of battle to expose these entities that are out to exploit migrant labor. PM joins the call for stronger legislation that will ensure the protection of the rights of migrant labor.”, said Ian Seruelo, US Liaison officer of the Partido ng Manggagawa (PM Labor Party)

According to the FEF statement, the objective of the legal action “is to ensure that these exploitative practices

end now. We do not want this to happen to any other teachers who come here from the Philippines or anywhere else. And we can not stop these oppressive schemes unless everyone involved understand that they cannot simply look the other way when they encounter abusive practices by recruiters.”

Representing the Filipino teachers is a legal team assembled by the Southern Poverty Law Center and American Federation of Teachers (AFT). AFT and Louisiana Federation of Teachers (LFT) have been instrumental in the struggle of the Filipino teachers. In the Philippines, PM and the PSLINK labor confederation are assisting the teachers’ efforts.###