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Translator/Interpreter/Owner  
Translations for a Small World

February 21, 2020

Maryland Senate Finance Committee  
Hearing - February 27, 2020

**Re: SB 742 - Fair Recruitment and Transparency Act – SUPPORT**

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Kathy Ogle and I am an interpreter by profession. Over the years I have interpreted for many migrant workers who come to work in the United States as part of guestworker programs. Their stories are compelling to me as they are a reflection of who we are as a society when we invite these “guests” to work among us.

The temporary work visa programs are designed to help U.S. employers bring foreign labor on a temporary basis and have sometimes worked well. Employers get the low-wage labor of hard-working migrants and “low-skilled” migrants can take advantage of one of the few legal ways of coming to work seasonally in the United States to earn dollars that can help their families make ends meet.

However, the system is also fraught with abuse and policymakers have known this for some time. It is not new. Over the years I have heard and interpreted stories of:

- Workers who had to cover the cost of their own passport, visa, transportation, and other fees in order to come to the U.S. By the time they arrived, they were deeply in debt.
- Workers who paid a recruiter a fee to be put on a list and considered for jobs in the U.S., only to lose that money and never get a job.
- Workers who never saw a contract at all and workers who signed papers written in a language they did not understand.
- Workers who were promised a certain hourly wage, only to be told that the wage was actually a daily rate that would be earned through 12-15 hours of work each day.
- Workers who were promised a certain number of hours of work each day, but then were given far fewer hours and therefore earned much less.
- Workers who wanted to leave a job and find another to escape workplace abuses, but knew their visa was tied to a specific employer.
- Workers who lived in isolated places where all their purchases came from a company store, so their earnings were funneled right back to the employer.

- Carnival workers who were forced to drive all night and then set up the rides the next day, then take down the rides and drive again to the next town with only a few hours of sleep.
- Agricultural workers crowded into rundown trailers with no bathroom, no air conditioning, and no kitchen.
- Cruise ship workers who were sexually harassed or abused or humiliated on the job, whose complaints were ignored.

Additionally, every year Maryland welcomes thousands of young people who are excited to be chosen for a State Department-approved J-1 visa for “cultural exchange.” Sadly, I have heard many stories from J-1 workers who arrive and find that the work is not what they were promised. Some worked in a warehouse for 12 hours a day with no opportunity to learn English or participate in any cultural activities. I have heard from Au Pairs on duty 6-7 days a week, working long hours and having no real way to get to know the country they had come to see.

Now, these abuses have not all taken place in Maryland or in relation to jobs in Maryland. But many of them have. Maryland employers have been among those who benefit from these guestworker programs and the hard work of these officially-sanctioned migrants. Thousands of these migrant workers are among us each year working in jobs such as landscaping, agriculture, and crab-picking to name a few.

I believe it is incumbent on Maryland to make sure that guestworker programs are well regulated and do not exploit or ignore the exploitation of workers. These programs should meet both the workers’ and employers’ needs. By adopting the measures contained in SB742, you will be taking important steps towards making Maryland employers model employers, and making the guestworker program something Maryland can be proud of.

Sincerely,

Kathy Ogle