

# Housecleaner sues for back wages

by Josh Wein  
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MENLO PARK -- The quiet Willows neighborhood received a loud wake-up call Tuesday as dozens of protesters rallied outside the home office of business owner Maria Giron's cleaning service.

Representatives from a handful of labor rights groups gathered outside Giron's home at 7 a.m. chanting, "Pay what you owe" in Spanish. The group came to support former Giron employee Dominga Lugo, who has filed a complaint with the California Labor Commission seeking more than \$10,000 in back wages and damages.

During the 10 years Lugo worked for Giron, she said she was made to work with pure bleach without protection, paid for eight hours when she worked 12 and transported from house to house in unsafe vehicles.

When Lugo complained to her boss about the conditions, "She'd say, 'I've got a lot of people who want to work. If you don't want to work, quit,'" Lugo said Tuesday.

It's a scenario that's all too common for immigrant workers, said Hillary Ronen, an attorney from the San Francisco-based La Raza Centro Legal, which is representing Lugo. The group has represented day laborers for years and recently took up the cause of domestic workers.

"Abuse of domestic workers is going on in the Bay Area," Ronen said.

But according to Maria Giron, it's not happening in her shop.

Giron said she was shocked to find the group of protesters in front of her house and claims she treats all her workers fairly.

"I don't force them to work. I never ask them to work with bleach," Giron said. "I started this business by myself 25 years ago, and this is the first problem I've ever had with anybody."

Karen Yu, an environmental health inspector with the city of San Francisco, attended the rally to provide information about domestic workers' legal rights. She said domestic workers have a long history of being mistreated in the eyes of California labor laws.

"Homeowners may hire domestic workers and they might not know about these laws," Yu said. "But a company such as this; they're a business. They should know the health and safety and wage laws."

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