

DA: Man Shortchanges Day Laborers Out Of Wages

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SAN FRANCISCO -- Prosecutors in San Francisco have filed felony charges against a contractor they said allegedly cheated day laborers out of wages.

Abdelmohssen "Mike" Abozaid was arrested on suspicion of picking up workers in San Francisco and not paying them full wages after they performed work, according to District Attorney Kamala Harris.

In one instance, Abozaid allegedly had laborers work a 14-hour day at a restaurant renovation in Santa Clara, Harris said.

When quitting time came around, Abozaid paid the workers only a portion of their wages, with no overtime and no breaks, according to the charges.

When one worker complained of not being paid, Abozaid threatened to report him to federal immigration authorities.

The district attorney's office is seeking thousands of dollars in restitution. Losses range from \$445 to \$3,535 per individual, according to the charges.

"Let everyone be clear," Harris said in a statement. "Immigrant communities will receive the full weight and support of the law. If people think they can take advantage of immigrants in San Francisco, they are mistaken."

San Francisco declared itself a sanctuary city in the late 1980s and just last year, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution barring city employees from assisting federal authorities in immigration raids.

"Immigrant workers of all nationalities come to this country primarily to earn wages for their families," said Sarah Shaker, executive director of Instituto Laboral de la Raza. "San Francisco will not tolerate abusive employers who seek out immigrant workers to exploit them for their hard labor."

Hillary Ronen, director of the worker's rights unit of La Raza Centro Legal, another organization assisting in the investigation, said employers steal services from vulnerable immigrants every day.

"Let this case be a warning to employers -- when you hire workers and knowingly fail to pay them, it is a crime and you will be held accountable."

Abozaid has not hired a lawyer yet.

Harris said her office is looking for more potential victims.