



News from:

**Oakland City Attorney Barbara J. Parker  
Centro Legal de la Raza**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **City Attorney and Centro Legal de la Raza sue hotel chain and local affiliate over violations of labor laws and Oakland's minimum wage ordinance**

**Complaint is the City's first lawsuit under the minimum wage law Oakland voters passed in 2014**

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*Oakland, CA* – An international hotel chain and its affiliate in Oakland systematically violated state labor laws and Oakland's minimum wage ordinance by refusing to pay overtime, failing to provide sick leave and engaging in other illegal conduct towards employees, according to a lawsuit City Attorney Barbara J. Parker and Centro Legal de la Raza filed on January 31st.

This is the City's first lawsuit under the minimum wage ordinance Oakland voters passed in November 2014.

[The City of Oakland, The People of the State of California, Matilda Cortez et al. v. Choice Hotels International, Inc. et al., Alameda County Superior Court Case No. RG17847671](#)

Evidence shows that Defendant Quality Inn on Enterprise Way in Oakland and its parent company, the Delaware-based Choice Hotels International, (1) forced employees to work off the clock and without pay before and after their shifts, (2) provided inaccurate wage statements to workers, (3) refused to provide rest, meal and bathroom breaks required by law, (4) failed to provide overtime and sick leave (5) and retaliated against employees who called in sick. The violations of the state Labor Code, California Business & Professions Code and Oakland's Municipal Code have been ongoing for at least four years.

"Women and workers of color face higher rates of wage theft and exploitation," City Attorney Parker said. "Every worker in California, regardless of their profession, race, gender or their immigration status is entitled to basic rights including sick leave and a minimum wage. My Office is committed to fighting this abuse, which not only violates state and local laws, but also undermines the stability and well-being of Oakland families."

The City Attorney on behalf of the City of Oakland and the People of California, and

Centro Legal de la Raza on behalf of the employee plaintiffs, jointly filed this lawsuit.

“Six women, all former housekeepers at Quality Inn in Oakland, came together to Centro Legal de la Raza because Quality Inn had been stealing their wages for years,” said Shira Levine, Litigation Staff Attorney at Centro Legal de la Raza. “Fear and employer retaliation permeate the housekeeping industry and allow employers to perpetuate exploitation. These six immigrant women overcame their personal fear and united to demand justice from their employer. For the first time, the City of Oakland and a nonprofit have joined forces in court to confront workplace exploitation. Through this partnership, we will seek justice for the workers we represent and deliver the clear message that wage theft will not be tolerated in the City of Oakland.”

The plaintiffs, all monolingual Spanish speakers, say they were intimidated by management and feared losing their jobs if they objected to violations.

“I felt bad about the job because we were suffering a lot, we worked a lot but we were not paid any overtime or given any sick time,” said plaintiff Matilda Cortez (as translated by Centro Legal). “Even if we brought in a doctor’s note, we were not paid for our sick time off. We did a lot of difficult work, cleaning rooms, cleaning up garbage outside, and cleaning the whole hotel, but we were not paid for all of this work.”

“We all came together to bring this claim because we are stronger as a group, and because so many of us were exploited,” Cortez said. “I want to finally be paid correctly for the hard work I did, but I also want Quality Inn to start paying the workers who are still there what the law requires and to stop taking advantage of workers.”

The lawsuit seeks unpaid wages and compensation owed to employees, plus penalties, damages, attorney’s fees and other costs.

In November 2014, Oakland voters overwhelmingly passed Measure FF, which established a minimum wage, requiring payment for accrued sick leave and payment of service charges to hospitality workers.

The measure established a minimum wage in the City of Oakland of \$12.25 per hour, beginning on March 2, 2015. The minimum wage rate increases every year on January 1 based on increases in the cost of living, and this year is set at \$12.86 per hour. The law also requires that employers in Oakland provide paid sick leave to their employees, and that hospitality employers who collect service charges from customers pay all service charges to their hospitality workers.

[More information about Oakland’s Minimum Wage law.](#)

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