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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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## **Worker Sues Garcia's Kitchen for Discrimination:**

*Seeks to Educate Workers about Rights and Public about HIV/AIDS*

ALBUQUERQUE, NM– At a press conference on Friday, former Garcia's Kitchen employee, Pedro Maldonado, with the support of EL CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos (EL CENTRO), a local immigrants' rights and workers' justice organization, will publicly denounce the discrimination he suffered at the restaurant. Maldonado, 34, is suing Garcia's Kitchen under the New Mexico Human Rights Act for discriminating against him on account of his HIV status.

Maldonado worked at Garcia's Kitchen for approximately 3 months during 2014. "The day I was fired I felt dehumanized, and stripped of my dignity because I was treated like a second class citizen", Maldonado said. "It had a major impact on me emotionally and economically, but I am using this experience to send the message to workers to learn about their rights and to educate the public and debunk many of the myths that still exist about HIV/AIDS."

Jessica Molzen, the CEO at New Mexico AIDS Services, recognizes that there is still a lot of misinformation that exists around HIV. "The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirms that there is no known risk of HIV transmission to co-workers, clients, or consumers from contact in industries such as food-service establishments. Food-service workers known to be infected with HIV need not be restricted from work unless they have other infections or illnesses for which **any** food-service worker, regardless of HIV infection status, should be restricted," Molzen added. "Employers should also be aware that workers with HIV are protected from discrimination by laws such as the Americans with Disability Act (ADA)." For more information Ms. Molzen recommends that individuals and business owners go to [www.AIDS.gov](http://www.AIDS.gov).

Workplace discrimination continues to be prevalent throughout the country. According to 2014 data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, in the state of NM alone, there were a total of 995 charges filed with the commission. Out of these, 29 percent were related to discrimination based on disability.

“What we know is that statistics on those who report discrimination don’t tell the whole story. Vulnerable communities, such as undocumented and LGBTQ workers are less likely to come forward to report exploitation and/or discrimination in the workplace due to fear of retaliation. Although New Mexico has an employment nondiscrimination in its policies, that doesn't always translate to protection in the workplace”, said Israel Chavez, director of development from EQNM.

In New Mexico in 2012, according to a study from AIDSvu, there were 2,558 known cases of people living with HIV/AIDS. In Bernalillo county alone an estimated 197 people out of every 100 thousand live with HIV.

“There is still a taboo about talking about HIV/AIDS”, said Maldonado. “That is why I decided to share my story with the hope of starting a community dialogue.”

For more information or if your are a worker who feels is facing discrimination in the workplace call El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos at (505)246-1627 or go to the website [www.elcentronm.org](http://www.elcentronm.org)

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