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**Press Release**

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Victory for New Mexican Working Families**  
***Immigrant Workers Fight to Recuperate Stolen Wages***

Albuquerque- Today, Judge Sedillo of the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court ruled in favor of workers who suffered wage theft at Hope Head Start, a childcare facility in Albuquerque. In a default judgment, Judge Sedillo ordered Hope Head Start to pay former employees Sabina's and Magdalena's wages owed, including statutory damages.

Wage theft is against the law and includes the failure to pay the mandated minimum wage, forcing workers to work off the clock, the non-payment of overtime, the nonpayment of all hours worked and the misclassification of workers. The damage from wage theft isn't limited to workers and their families as it robs local, state, and federal governments of tax-payer's money to be used for schools, roads, and other services we rely on. In addition, wage theft creates an unfair playing field for honest employers.

Sabina and Magdalena worked for more than a year, along with Sabina's daughter, Cindy, and sister, Nirma, at the child care center based in Albuquerque. All four reported a pattern of late payment for their work, often weeks at a time. In early November 2015, they were effectively forced to resign, because they had not been paid for more than three weeks and could not afford to work for free, as fixed expenses such as rent and other living expenses accumulated. Repeated efforts by all the women to collect payment for work performed were rebuffed by the employer. Subsequently, they filed claims with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, which is in charged with administrative enforcement of our state's wage statutes.

As active members of El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos (El CENTRO), an immigrants' rights and workers' justice organization, Sabina and the others organized to bring their case to light.

The severe and immediate impact wage theft had on their lives inspired them to work with El CENTRO, not only to resolve their immediate cases, but to strengthen protections for all workers in New Mexico. In 2015, they, along with members of El CENTRO, held a protest outside of the childcare facility demanding payment for their work and were met with open hostility by the employer who, in the face of public pressure, still refused to pay them.

As their case made its way through the Department, the women experienced needless delays in processing due to language access difficulties and procedural barriers. Nonetheless, the ruling by the Metropolitan Court today closes a chapter for the four and represents a significant victory for this group, sending a message to unscrupulous employers, “ya basta!” (enough is enough!). The next step for the workers and El CENTRO is to ensure that Hope Head Start actually complies with the court order and pays the amounts ordered by the courts..

Marco Nuñez, the Worker Justice Coordinator at El CENTRO says of this decision, “this case is about more than wages owed, it represents the imperative of resilience and urgency needed to confront unlawful business practices. Wage theft cannot be tolerated as a business model in Albuquerque, especially given its negative impact on whole communities. El CENTRO and the Center for Law and Poverty will remain vigilant to ensure that Hope Head Start comply with this ruling and pays not only the stolen wages but also the fines.”

Low-Wage workers are more organized than ever. Sabina, along with other workers, are successfully fighting back, “together with El CENTRO we have been able to organize to confront these abuses and push to hold accountable the very institutions entrusted with enforcing the laws”. She claims, “El CENTRO is a space where we learn that we are not alone and how to organize ourselves to defend not only our rights but the rights of other workers. I will continue to organize with other workers because the rights of all New Mexican workers must be respected.”

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*\*El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos is a grassroots, immigrants' rights and workers' justice organization based in Albuquerque, NM that works with Latino immigrant communities and allies to defend, strengthen, and advance the rights of our community.*