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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Workers denounce discrimination suffered at South Valley Care Center

ALBUQUERQUE, NM– At a press conference on Wednesday, former South Valley Care Center employees, María A Perez & María Nevarez, with the support of El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos (El CENTRO), a local immigrants’ rights and workers’ justice organization, publicly denounced the discrimination they suffered at the nursing home. The workers committee created by María A. Perez and María E. Nevarez, known as “Las Marías”, submitted claims with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and the Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission (EEOC) alleging continuous discrimination.

María Nevarez, 50, worked for almost a decade at the South Valley Care Center, as a housekeeping worker in the laundry room of the facilities. “For almost a decade, I suffered discrimination. We tried several times to mediate the situation and improve the treatment we received, but we were never taken seriously. We faced difficulties trying to exercise our rights as workers. We experienced clear preferential treatment between the younger, English-speaking workers, while non-English-speaking Mexican women over 40 were discriminated against and limited in our access to materials, resources, and opportunities. Language should never be a barrier to job opportunities or fair treatment in the workplace.”

According to several studies, workplace abuse tends to cluster. Employers who violate one labor law are often willing to violate others. Moreover, wage theft, discrimination, and health and safety violations are frequently linked to low-wage industries where people of color and immigrants primarily work¹

María Perez, 58, worked for seven months at the same care facility. “We want to send a clear message to abusive employers: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! We will no longer allow more discrimination, nor more retaliation for defending our rights. We embark on this path collectively with the purpose of making this business have healthier labor practices. As New Mexicans, we must stand together to ensure that the rights of workers are not violated. By

¹ Somos Gallup - Somos Un Pueblo Unido “Two Groups, One Community”; The McKinley Worker Justice Coalition. 2017, April <https://www.somosunpueblounido.org/assets/finalfullhiamay23rd.pdf>

fighting for our rights, we also fight for the rights of others and for future generations” Perez expressed.

One in eight workers, approximately 13% of New Mexico's labor force, is an immigrant, making up a vital part of the state’s workforce across industries, including hospitality and service, construction, agriculture, oil and gas, and home health care.² “We are proud of the contributions of low-wage immigrant workers in New Mexico”, stated Marian Méndez Cera, Policy and Workers’ Justice Coordinator at El CENTRO. “We cannot deem workers like Maria Perez and Maria Nevarez “essential” during the pandemic, having them risk their lives to support the care of New Mexico’s elderly, and yet not afford them basic rights and protections.”

“All workers have the legal and moral right to work free of discrimination in the workplace,” stated Felipe Guevara, workers’ attorney from the NM Center on Law and Poverty. “Many employers, such as South Valley Care Center, however, often ignore their legal and moral obligations and discriminate against their employees. Employers do this to intimidate workers and to preclude workers from having certain rights. When this occurs, employees should, like Ms. Nevarez and Perez, complain to the relevant authorities to ensure that the employer’s actions are investigated and, if necessary, remedied. Every worker deserves to be treated fairly.”

A study by the National Council of La Raza (now Unidos US) found that 1 in 4 Latino workers reported experiencing discrimination at work based on their language abilities.³

Retaliation claims, where employees face adverse actions after engaging in protected activity (such as reporting discrimination), are one of the most commonly filed charges with the EEOC. In 2020, New Mexico had 365 retaliation charges.⁴

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El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos is an Albuquerque-based civil rights, immigrants’ rights, and workers’ justice organization that advocates for just working conditions, dignified wages, and policies that ensure that all New Mexicans’ have the opportunity thrive.

² By 2030, New Mexico will rank fourth in the nation for persons who are elderly. Three million of the projected 5 million direct caregivers in the nation will be working in people’s homes (rather than institutions) by 2020.

³ Unidos US “Toward a More Perfect Union: Understanding Systemic Racism and Resulting Inequity in Latino Communities” 2021, April https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/unidosus_systemicracismpaper.pdf

⁴ <https://www.eeoc.gov/retaliation>