



Workers sue LI nail salon owners over pay, breaks

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A group of women who earn their living giving pedicures and manicures at Old Bethpage and Glen Head salons took up a new activity Tuesday - a sign-waving demonstration on the steps of the U.S. District courthouse in Central Islip.

They were bringing attention to what they said were abusive job conditions such as 60-hour workweeks with no overtime pay and no lunch breaks.

Then, a short time after the rain-soaked protesters put aside their placards and leaflets, they entered an eighth-floor courtroom where federal Magistrate Judge William D. Wall ruled that their labor-law case could proceed to trial.

"This case is about the exploitation of non-English speaking workers for personal financial gain," the complaint said.

Lawyers for the owners, Qixing Li and Guining Cui - who do business as Susan and John Lee - declined to comment. Court papers filed on their behalf deny the allegations.

Workers Siew V. Thong, Yue F. Xia, and Qiao F. Chen, filed suit against the salon owners whose shops have variously used the names Always Is Nails, Viva Nails & Spa Inc., Diva Nails and Lovely Nails.

The two salons are at 744 Old Bethpage Rd., Old Bethpage, and 240 Glen Head Rd., Glen Head.

The three women, all from Queens, said Chinese women in particular were exploited and some were paid as little as \$40 a day for 10 1/2 hours' work.

It was no use seeking work elsewhere because such conditions for non-English speaking workers are the same at other nail salons on Long Island and the metropolitan area, said one of the women, Siew Thong.

"We have no lunch break, more than 10 hours a day, six days a week," said Thong, 35, of Flushing, the only one of the three who speaks limited English.

Thong said her pay peaked at \$70 a day in September, when she was fired for complaining about conditions. Federal minimum wage and overtime law require more than \$540 in wages for such a workweek, but instead she was paid \$420 a week, she said.

The suit also says the owners "evaded wage and labor statutes by hiring non-English speaking workers for their Long Island nail salon[s] . . . (and) counted on the fact that recent immigrants would be more likely to work for unlawfully low wages without complaint."

The owners also forced the workers to pay for the shop's nail clippers and drills, deducting the cost of equipment from their pay, the complainants said.

The Justice Will be Served! Campaign, which is sponsored by three different organizations whose membership is comprised of workers of different backgrounds, the Urban Justice Center in Manhattan, and the law firm of Covington and Burling of Manhattan are helping the workers with the suit.

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