



**Farm
Labor
Organizing
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Senator Jackson silent on wage theft charges; 10,000 petitions delivered to Senator's office

(Raleigh, NC) A group of labor leaders, faith leaders, and community allies joined with FLOC, a farmworkers union, at the NCGA today to deliver a 10,000 signature petition to Senator Brent Jackson, calling on him to pay wages owed and reinstate seven farmworkers who worked on his farm in Autryville, NC in 2015, and were blacklisted after speaking out against the wage theft and other labor violations on the farm. Senator Jackson was not present to accept the petition, and a request for a meeting with his office was ignored. Requests for the Senator's position on the issue have been referred to his attorney.

In February, the seven farmworkers filed a lawsuit against Jackson for unpaid wages for hours worked in 2015. One of those workers is also suing over his unjust termination, after he was fired and evicted from his housing for being unable to pay \$2,400 for a piece of equipment broken during a workplace accident. In a clear case of retaliation for speaking out, all seven workers were blacklisted and not offered employment on the farm this season. Workers also report incidents of harassment and intimidation from farm employees after speaking out against these violations, including a farm employee telling one worker that they would not be offered employment again unless they dropped the lawsuit.

"We began to notice that the grower and supervisor would steal our wages by clocking us out for anything they could, like changing fields, waiting for equipment to come, or water breaks. Little by little, this added up and by the end of the season he had stolen thousands of dollars from our wages," said Valentin Alvarado Hernandez in a statement read at the press conference on his behalf.

Farmworkers also filed a complaint against Jackson for wage theft in 2014, and Jackson had to pay thousands of dollars to settle the grievance using the union contact between FLOC and the North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA), which Jackson Farms was under at the time. In 2015, Senator Jackson decided to leave the NCGA to avoid further scrutiny from the union, and continued illegal practices.

Justin Flores, Vice President of FLOC, says that the retaliation on Jackson Farms is not uncommon, and the only way to prevent it from happening is to ensure that farmworkers have the right to freedom of association and a safe grievance procedure. "This example shows how farmworkers are very aware that if they speak up about violations, there are often very real consequences, including blacklisting," says Flores. "However, growers aren't the only responsible party. Tobacco giants such as Reynolds American, Philip Morris International, and Alliance One continue to make huge profits, while refusing to sign an agreement with FLOC that would guarantee labor rights and the right to complain without fear of retaliation."

"I would like to say to Senator Jackson, why are we not being given work this year," Valentin said in his written statement. "We only asked for what is ours and for what the law says: that we should get paid and that the supervisor stop abusing people. We don't deserve to lose our job for speaking out."

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