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IMMIGRATION

Lawsuit Claims Airport Employers Cheated Immigrants

Ten Mexican workers today filed a class-action lawsuit targeting nine employers around O'Hare International Airport. They say the companies cheated immigrants out of thousands of hours of wages. We report from our West Side bureau.

The case emerged after federal authorities arrested dozens of airport workers last November. The raids led to felony charges over fake airport security badges, and put many of the workers into deportation proceedings. The plaintiffs say United Airlines and the other companies brought them to O'Hare through a temporary agency.

Fifty-nine-year-old José Hernández says he worked five years for the agency and supported his wife and their two daughters back in the Mexican state of Guerrero. His criminal case is over, but he still faces deportation.

HERNANDEZ: Apenas hace tres días que me hablo mi esposa...

Just three days ago, he says, his wife called to see if he could send money to keep their 15-year-old in high school. But he can't help them anymore, he says.

Telephone numbers for the temporary agency, the Bensenville-based Ideal Staffing Solutions, Inc., have been disconnected. A spokeswoman for United says the airline is not responsible because the immigrants came to its cargo facilities through a contractor.

The workers' attorneys argue United does share blame.