

Good afternoon

I am Ben Corpuz

Co-chair of the Filipino Workers Network.

Filipino Workers network is a network of Filipino-Canadian union members in greater Toronto to support each other in our union work and to engage members who are not involved in their unions. It is led by activists and union leaders from our community

In Canada, there is an estimated 700,000 Filipinos. Around 50% are in Ontario. About 40% of that live in the greater Toronto area.

In the workforce, according to the Canada Ministry of Labour, in 2006, in Ontario 49.1% Filipinos in the workforce. Filipinos have 75% labour participation rate. Most Filipinos are employed in precarious and vulnerable jobs. The most recent years, Filipinos came through the temporary foreign workers particularly in the live-in caregiver program and in the food service sector.

The main protection for these workers is the employment standard act (ESA). The two major recommendation we forward today to improve ESA are ENFORCEMENT AND EDUCATION.

ENFORCEMENT

1. Enforcing ESA is crucial, because it is a flawed system if the government expects workers to raise problems. The system needs proper staffing level of inspectors with proper language skills and cultural competencies to interact with workers and small business owners from different communities.

EDUCATION

2. **Education of ESA to the workers.** Need multilingual options.

I am part of a community organization that holds an annual personal tax and financial session for Filipino newcomers in Toronto and we found that most newcomer workers do not understand their rights in the ESA. They are being exploited by their employers. The contract they signed is not followed. Their EI and CPP are not paid. They are not given their paystub. At the end of the year they are required to file taxes and end up paying the employer share of EI and CPP. Yet as temp workers, most of them are not eligible for EI when they are terminated.

3. **Education of ESA to the employers.** Again, when Filipino workers learned about their rights and are raising these to their employers, their employers tell them that they did not know about the ESA standards.

Education for both employers and workers are necessary to effectively make the ESA work.

4. **Temp agencies and their clients should be jointly held accountable for the implementation of ESA.**
5. WSIB has successfully created as an enforcement regime includes dependent/independent contractors and the client owner accountable around Health and Safety. The same model should be applied to ESA.

Today I have with me Josh Cuasay also of the Filipino Workers Network who will share her organizing experience.

1. Card check should be the process to unionize workplaces. Give example of Trump Tower and Sutton Place.
2. Successor rights in the food service industry.

Deputation of Josh Cuasay to the Changing Workplaces Review

My name is Josh Cuasay. I am a leader of the Filipino Network; I am a room attendant at the Suites at One King West Hotel in downtown Toronto; and I am an elected member of the Executive Board of UNITE HERE Local 75, the union for hotel and food service workers across North America . In the GTA we represent some 9000 hotel, gaming, and food service workers here

I want to talk to you about three things this afternoon:

- What brought me to Canada
- My experience since I have come here
- And how our existing old system of labour laws doesn't work in today's society if we want immigrant workers like me and our families to succeed

I came to Canada in 2001 as a care-giver. I had been doing the same work in Hong Kong for 9 years. I left my home in the Phillipines to build a better life for myself and my family. In Hong Kong, no matter how long I worked there, I would never be able to achieve full rights as a citizen

or worker. I couldn't build that life that had led me to leave my home where most of my family still lives today.

I picked Canada because, at the time, Canada had a reputation for accepting immigrants with open arms and, as an LGBTQ person, for tolerance in this way too.

I wish that I could say that my experience had 100% lived up to my expectations. But I can't.

It was very hard when I first got here. I worked as a care-giver with a family for years. I loved the work that I did but I couldn't afford to live and I had no rights. Then I worked as a cleaner in a non-union restaurant and at a Tim Horton's in downtown Toronto. None of these jobs were unionized. Our rights were never respected. The pay was far too low to support or raise a family. I thought to myself: I left the Phillipines for this? How is this different than Hong Kong?

Then, like many people from the Phillipines here in the GTA, I got a job as a room attendant at a hotel. For me, it was the Suites at One King West.

Under the previous owner, we were treated so badly. We weren't paid our vacation pay, we weren't given holidays. There were no sick days. There were no benefits. Some of us were forced to clean the owner's or manager's houses. Some of us were forced to clean other buildings that the owner had. People were injured at work and just thrown aside. We had no rights.

One of my co-workers who worked in a unionized workplace before approached me and gave me the number of the union.

The Company found out that he had done this and he was fired.

This is what happens all of the time and no one – not the Labour Board, not the Union, the public – no one knows these stories. He was fired before other than the Company even knew that we were going to try and unionize.

But I knew. And I wouldn't give up.

In the end, when we filed for our union vote, I was written up 17 times and suspended between the date that we filed and the date of the election.

Still I wouldn't give up. And we won. If I had given in to my fear – and I was afraid because I was going to lose this job and end up back at Tim Horton's or night cleaning which was even worse – If I had given up, my co-workers would have to and we would have lost.

Is this how hard we want to make it here in Ontario/for immigrant workers like me/to secure the tools we need for building the better lives that brought us to this country and this province in the first place?

Because most people would have given up. And most people – like my friend who was fired – do give up. And most people in the service sector don't have unions. And all of us are struggling. This is not why we came to Canada.

This is why we need to make things more fair for immigrant workers in today's economy.

If we had card check, the fear that I went through – the fear that we are all going through – would be lessened and then we really could exercise our rights – the rights that brought us to Canada in the first place.