

California

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Carwash Workers File Class Action

By Anat Rubin

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Current and former workers of four Los Angeles carwash establishments accused their employers of rampant wage and hour violations in a class action lawsuit filed in Superior Court Thursday.

Attorneys for the eight name plaintiffs, representing a class of 250 workers, said brothers Benny and Nisan Pirian, owners of Vermont Hand Wash, Celebrity Car Wash, Hollywood Car Wash and Five Star Car Wash, denied meal and rest breaks, failed to provide overtime pay and often refused to pay workers altogether.

"Some of them just worked for tips," said Kevin Kish, director of Bet Tzedek Legal Services' Employment Rights Project. "Some worked 10-hour workdays for less than \$35."

Benny and Nisan Pirian could not be reached for comment.

Labor rights advocates said they have known for years that car wash workers in Southern California, many of them undocumented and afraid to speak up, were being exploited.

A recent organizing campaign on behalf of the workers has shed light on the industry-wide violations. The director of the campaign, Paul Lee of the AFL-CIO, said he has seen some positive changes.

"Since we've gone public with the message, some employers have made some improvements," he said. "But many places have not changed."

At the Pirian establishments, Kish said, the abuses continued unabated.

"Workers were required to sign blank time cards," Kish said.

"They had to pay cash back to their employers in exchange for their paychecks, so what is on the record is less money than what the workers are paid."

Kish said organizers and lawyers have for the last year been urging the Pirian brothers to comply with the law.

"It's really a last-ditch effort," Kish said. "They can't claim they didn't see this coming."

Bet Tzedek attorneys have brought numerous cases on behalf of individual carwash workers in the last few years. They joined forces with labor and employment lawyers at **Bush Gottlieb** to bring the current suit.

"There's a lot of bad actors in this industry, but these guys are the worst of the worst," said Bet Tzedek director **Mitch Kamin**. "Our hope is that this lawsuit will send a message."