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**FILIPINO BAKERY WORKERS RECEIVE T VISAS
AFTER BEING TRAFFICKED FROM THE PHILIPPINES**

Advancing Justice-LA and Congressman Ted Lieu Announce T Visas for 11 Workers

LOS ANGELES – After a year-long legal battle resulting in a \$15.2 million default judgment last month, the 11 Filipino workers who sued the owners of L’Amande French Bakery were also recently granted T visas, also known as T Nonimmigrant Status. T visas provide victims of human trafficking temporary legal status and work authorization and allow them to bring their families to the U.S.

“We are thrilled that our clients have the opportunity to rebuild their lives in the U.S. This case represents a harder to detect, but perhaps more prevalent form of human trafficking than what we are used to hearing about,” said Yanin Senachai, a staff attorney at Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles. “The employer in this case held the workers as captive labor, not with the use of barbed wire and armed guard, but with more subtle forms of coercion, including forcing a significant debt on the workers and threatening to harm them in the home country.”

The workers were fraudulently lured by their employer to the United States from the Philippines on E-2 visas and then subjected to abusive and exploitative working conditions, including workdays as long as 17 hours and wages as low as three dollars an hour. The workers were also threatened with a significant debt of \$11,000 each unless they agreed to work under these illegal conditions for at least three years.

When the workers refused to lie to authorities about their working conditions, the owners of the bakery retaliated by terminating their positions, leaving the workers in immigration limbo. They also threatened to use their political connections to harm the workers and their families in the Philippines.

In March 2015, Congressman Ted W. Lieu met with the workers, concerned about the employer’s abuse of the guestworker program as part of a scheme to obtain forced labor. As a result of the meeting, Congressman Lieu reached out to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in support of the workers.

“During our meeting, the Filipino guestworkers recounted a systematic and lengthy period of verbal and physical abuse by their employers. It is disheartening to know that human trafficking can occur so close to home and that individuals are subjected to such psychological and inhumane treatment,” said Congressman Lieu. “In this case, the Filipino workers’ story ultimately ends with a victory in justice’s name. Sadly, however, their story is just one of many. I will work with Advancing Justice-LA on ways to improve how our government assists victims of human trafficking and to prevent future cases so women, men and children are not subjected to such deplorable treatment in the United States.”

With the T visas, the 11 workers have a chance to rebuild their lives here in the United States, including the ability to find other employment. All 11 workers are now employed elsewhere and several are planning to bring over family members they have not seen in years.

“I am grateful for the hard work of our lawyers, and, to Congressman Ted Lieu, for listening to our hearts and believing in us,” said Romar Cunanan, one of the workers recruited to work at the bakery. “With his kind heart, he helped all of us to get T visas so we can continue to work here in the U.S. and to reunite with our family, without fear of what defendants can do to us.”

Advancing Justice-LA filed the T visas on behalf of the workers with the help of attorneys Nicole Kim, Angela Makabali, and Maximillian Hirsch, working under the auspices of Skadden’s pro bono program.

T visa recipients and the attorneys from this case are available for interviews. Please email rbunnao@advancingjustice-la.org to arrange.

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***Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles** (Advancing Justice-LA) is the nation’s largest legal and civil rights organization for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (NHPI). Through direct services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, leadership development, and capacity building, Advancing Justice-LA focuses on the most vulnerable members of Asian American and NHPI communities while also building a strong voice for civil rights and social justice.*

***Congressman Ted W. Lieu** serves on the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. He is also the Democratic Freshman Class President and a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force Reserves.*