

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – Filipino teachers of Prince George’s County in Maryland and their supporters are planning to picket in front of the White House in Washington

,  
D.C.

Tuesday (Aug. 9) from

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to

5 p.m.

to call attention to the injustice handed to them by the U.S. Department of Labor (

DOL

) and the

Prince George

’s County Public Schools (PGCPS).

At the same time, the Migrant Heritage Commission based in Washington D.C. had asked Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley and the Prince

George's County State Attorney to investigate the possible involvement of PGC and PGCPs officials in the recruitment and hiring of teachers whether or not irregularities, anomalous arrangements and transactions and corrupt practices were committed by these officials during the recruitment and hiring process.

The DOL and PGCPs reached agreement last July 7 after the DOL found PGCPs to be a willful violator of H1B regulations for underpaying teachers on the teachers' H1B visas. As part of the settlement, PGCPs agreed to pay back wages, a \$100,000 penalty and would be debarred for two years. This means PGCPs could no longer act as sponsor for any of the foreign workers.

The penalty to PGCPs also means that it will be terminating the employment of teachers and their lawful presence in the U.S.

The picket will show their outrage over the blatant injustice and to bring to the Obama administration an aspect of a U.S. broken immigration system.

Written by

Tuesday, 09 August 2011 21:26 -

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Joanna Quiambao of the Katarungan, a Filipino-American grassroots human rights organization, said “it’s a travesty that these victimized teachers who have raised the standard of education in PG county are not unceremoniously dismissed without regard to their performance or seniority. This is how some foreign workers become undocumented through no fault of their own.”

The teachers are seeking audience with representatives of the White House’s Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. They plan to discuss an equitable solution for the teachers and highlight the deficiencies they experienced with the H1B program and immigration system.

## **"HOW CAN I GO BACK TO PH"?**

“How in the world can I go back to the Philippines in nine days? I have a car loan, doctors' appointments, financial obligations, etc. My family is with me here, we cannot just pack our bags and go home. This is our life at stake, we need to plan for it! Talk about injustice! They could not even give a 45 day notice like our apartment does,” exclaims Ms. Gumanoy, one of the hundreds of teachers impacted.

"We are pursuing all legal channels to appeal the decision, but because of the urgency of the situation, the teachers have been pushed to take to the streets and do what we do best: educate the public and authorities on the issue. For the teachers fortunate to still have a job and reporting back to their classes later this week, we found it important to plan this picket to show our solidarity with our brothers and sisters that are not so lucky," according to Carlo Parapara, president of the Filipino Educator's Network of PG County.

Meanwhile, the Migrant Heritage Commission (MHC) has likewise asked the Philippine government to investigate the Philippine recruitment agencies, which were responsible in sending more than 1000 teachers to various parts of the US, including Maryland.

MHC co-executive directors Jesse Gatchalian and Grace Valera-Jaramillo will personally deliver the petition letter to the office of Governor O'Malley.

As the case is being investigated, the MHC has also asked the Department of Homeland Security to allow the issuance of U visas, deferred action status, and continued presence status of the affected teachers while the case is being investigated.

“We ask the Department of Education to stand on behalf of the teachers and the thousands of students who will be affected by the vacuum created with loss of these teachers and the County’s inability to hire new teachers due to the debarment penalty meted on it.

“We sincerely ask the Labor and Education departments to continue hiring these teachers, based on merits. Excellent and dedicated teachers are the real engines of any school. They must be given their due so that they continue to mold the youth into good citizens and leaders of the country.” # #  
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