

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – The First Circuit Court of Appeals of Louisiana has affirmed recently a ruling of a Baton Rouge civil district judge who earlier ordered a Filipino woman recruiter to pay an “estimated \$1.8 million in illegally charged placement fees, as well as a \$500 fine and \$7,500 in attorney fees.”

In affirming the ruling, the three-judge panel composed of Judges Edward J. "Jimmy" Gaidry, J. Michael McDonald Jefferson D. Hughes

III
in Baton Rouge, Judge Gaidry, who penned the decision, faulted Universal

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Placement International of Los Angeles, California, for violating Louisiana Private Employment Services law when it operated as a private employment service in Louisiana although it has a license to do business in Louisiana.

UPI operates an employment service in California. It contracted to employ Filipino teachers in Louisiana school district, procured and transmitted all necessary immigration documents, arranged housing, signed lease agreements and obtained financing for Filipino teachers' expenses "in exchange for the payment of fees by the teachers."

In September 2009 Louisiana Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers filed a complaint against UPI with the Louisiana Workforce Commission in violation of the Private Employment Service Law.

COLLECTS MARKETING FEE

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The Commission later found out Universal was operating a private employment service in the state of Louisiana without a license to do so. UPI also collected "marketing fee," placement fees, employment services fees and failing to adjust its fees upward or downward based on actual gross earnings of the applicant.

According to Judge Janice Clark of the Baton Rouge's 19th Judicial District, the recruiter cheated 200 Filipino teachers of thousands of dollars in recruiting fees and held them in virtual servitude for keeping their visas.

The complaints against the company and Navarro were filed in 2009 on behalf of about 360 Filipino nationals who were hired in Caddo Parish, East Baton Rouge Parish, Jefferson Parish and the State Recovery School District in New Orleans.

When some of those teachers arrived in the U.S., there were no jobs waiting

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for them as promised. Others ended up working in far-off Avoyelles Parish and other school districts around the state.

Navarro was charged with exacting \$5,000 from each teacher in job placement fees and obligating each teacher to sign a contract to pay Navarro 10 percent of their second-year salaries.

Teachers who could not afford to pay the fees up front were directed to loan companies by Navarro, and were charged exorbitant interest rates.

Email message for Ms. Navarro, seeking comment, was not answered. # # #

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sourced stories, features, photos, audios and videos and multi-media contents.)

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