

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

Nightmare for Baltimore's Day Laborers: their exploitation in the marketplace is too costly in both economic and humane terms. The facts, and recommendations.

ABELL SALUTES: Community Law Center. "To see their work, walk down your street."

The East Baltimore neighborhood that hugs the northwest corner of Patterson Park, taking in the well-kept row houses of Streeper, Linwood and Lombard Streets and Fairmount Avenue, was in the 1990s, after a decade of instability through the 1980s, a neighborhood on the way back. But a roadblock presented itself—the insidious practice of “flipping”—the illegal selling of a house at inflated value based on a fraudulent appraisal. The effect was to deflate the property values of the neighborhood, compromise its quality of life, and dampen the spirits of its aspiring homeowners.

At the same time, over in West Baltimore in the Druid Heights neighborhood—bounded by (clockwise) North Avenue, Tiffany Alley, Laurens Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, rehabilitation was being seriously and negatively affected by the problems of vacant housing, bound up in turn with the problems of absentee landlords.

These City neighborhoods, along with dozens of others, have turned for

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Day laborers are persons employed temporarily, anywhere from one day to several months, in jobs that typically require manual labor. Nationwide, employers are increasingly turning to this temporary workforce to meet their employment needs and the costs of wages and benefits. In Baltimore, approximately 7,000 to 10,000 workers are employed as day laborers, providing a supply of temporary workers to construction contractors, warehouses, restaurants, cleaning companies, hospitals, convention centers and stadiums. Employers find these workers in Baltimore by contracting with “labor pools” (temporary staffing agencies that engage and transport primarily African-American men to job sites) or by negotiating employment terms with Latino immigrant workers on street corners.

With a grant from The Abell Foundation, CASA of Maryland (CASA) and the Homeless Persons Representation Project (HPRP) initiated and authored Baltimore's Day Laborer Report: Their Stolen Sweat, to chronicle the experiences of Baltimore's African-American and Latino day laborers. HPRP conducted 105 interviews with a random selection of workers drawn proportionately from the four largest labor pools in Baltimore City: TOPS, Labor Ready, Just Temps / Personnel Plus, and Ready Staffing. CASA conducted 20 interviews with Latino day laborers and a focus group discussion with 16 Latino day laborers. Based on these interviews, CASA and HPRP found that:

- 1. Both immigrant and African-American day laborers are underpaid for their work, typically earning far less than permanent employees performing the same duties.*
- 2. Day laborers are at greater risk to injury on construction jobs than the full-time employees working beside them. Day laborers experience a higher injury rate; the workers interviewed reported that they do not receive the same safety equipment as full-time employees.*
- 3. Day laborers suffer frequent mistreatment on the job. The workers interviewed recalled verbal assaults from supervisors, being required to perform repugnant and dangerous work that permanent employees reject, and being denied breaks for water and food. Many labor pool halls and worksites lack restrooms and access to water.*

Baltimore City should provide Baltimore' day laborers with a safe location to find jobs, receive workplace-rights education, health and safety training, and to develop their skills. The City should establish and enforce employment standards for both labor pool companies and employers who hire day laborers.

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Overview: Immigrant Day Laborers and Labor Pool Workers

STREET CORNER

Miguel wakes up at 5:00 a.m., grabs his tools, and takes a bus across town to a convenience store in Fells Point where 30 to 40 other Latino men wait for a job. At 6:30 a.m. a blue van pulls into the parking lot. Miguel and his fellow workers rush to the driver's window. In limited English, they ask a few basic questions about wages and the type of job. The workers offer their trust and job skills to the unknown contractor. The driver negotiates with Miguel and three other workers to paint at a residential construction site for \$9 an hour. They jump into the van eager to work and relieved to have secured a day's wages. The trip to the worksite may take 15 minutes, or it may take an hour; the workers never know and almost never are paid for travel time to and from the worksite. Like most day laborers, Miguel and his co-workers cannot be sure they will be paid their earned wages until they have the money in their hands. They take the risk; it is the only choice they have. On this day, they work diligently for 12 hours. At the end of the day, the employer expresses dissatisfaction with their work. He arbitrarily tells them they will get \$7 an hour for only nine hours, rather than the negotiated rate of \$9 per hour for each hour they worked. Exhausted and frustrated, Miguel accepts \$45 less than he earned. He then starts his long journey home by bus, after the boss drives away without him.

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This study found that immigrant and African-American Baltimore day laborers are underpaid for their work, typically earning less than permanent employees performing the same work.

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LABOR POOL

Across town, Karl and a hundred other men gather in the morning at the corner of Franklin and Howard Streets, the former center of Baltimore's brightest retail establishments. Today, boarded-up windows and abandoned shops greet the workers. Behind Karl, a large white sign with "TOPS" (an acronym for "Temporary Overload Personnel Services") hangs above the store front. Some men have spent the night in front of this sign, bundled up in blankets, until TOPS opens at 4:30 a.m. As men continue to wait for work, a piercing voice blares over the loudspeaker: "Wallace, Reed and Jones report to van 15." Three African-American men grab their bags, and meet the van driver who will deliver the workers to an unknown jobsite. It's 6:00 a.m. After a number of stops to discharge other workers, Karl is dropped off at a construction site in Harford County, where he'll spend the next eight hours

cleaning debris and loading drywall boards. At 3:00 p.m., Karl's supervisor tells him to stop working. One hour later, the van returns to take Karl back to the labor pool. Along the way, the van stops at other sites to pick up more workers. Finally, thirteen hours after Karl arrived at TOPS, he returns and hands the TOPS dispatcher his work ticket, signed by the construction site supervisor.

For this work, Karl receives the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour for only eight hours. Today, he receives a small portion directly in cash. He will receive the rest by check at the end of the workweek, minus \$3.00 for the van ride and \$2.00 for work gloves. The deductions reduce Karl's wages to below the legal minimum. Despite the low wage, the construction contractor paid TOPS \$12.00 per hour for Karl's services along with a \$3.00 transportation fee.

DAY LABORERS AND THE RISE OF CONTINGENT WORK

Miguel and Karl are day laborers. Nationwide, these workers generally fall into two categories: (1) workers who negotiate their own terms of employment with contractors on street corners or at centers run by non-profit organizations; and (2) workers who accept pre-set terms of employment at temporary staffing agencies – known as "labor pools" – like TOPS, who supply contractors with labor. In Baltimore, the informal, street corner arrangement is mainly used by Latino men while labor pool workers typically are African-Americans.

At first glance, the two groups appear to be distinct; yet they share many characteristics, including their increasing popularity among employers

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seeking to cut costs and avoid liability. The history of the labor pools offers a clear illustration of the particular challenges that Baltimore's day laborers face. In a 1992 report, Atlanta's Labor Pool Task Force identified the 1987 stock market crash as the catalyst to a boom in the national labor pool industry. Its report found that pools were growing 20 percent annually. In 1999, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)² found that the "personnel supply service" industry dominated by the pools increased its share of the overall labor market from 0.5 percent in 1982, to 2.3 percent in 1997, making it one of the fastest growing sectors of the labor market.³ Also in 1999, *Fortune* ranked Labor Ready, which began a national chain of labor pools in the early 1990s that now extends to 48 states and the Cayman Islands, as the nation's leading provider of temporary manual labor.

By hiring day laborers, employers may save money by paying the temporary workers less than their other workers earn, while also avoiding the cost of workers' compensation, income and payroll tax withholding, unemployment insurance, and health insurance.

The labor pool arrangement is sanctioned by law. The labor broker – the pool – is considered the legal employer responsible for covering the cost of workers' compensation insurance and taxes. Arguably, of this cost is passed on to the contractor. However, contractors seeking to pay lower wages can avoid even this passed through cost by negotiating directly with immigrant workers on street corners.

Some day laborers may negotiate higher wage levels than are offered to their labor pool counterparts. Still, they face a substantial risk of not being paid

in full or even at all. Labor pool workers have few problems getting paid, but rarely make more than minimum wage. Frequently, their wages fall below minimum wage due to a series of unlawful deductions and illegitimate fees.

In both cases, the brokers and contractors who employ this workforce capitalize on the workers' lack of transportation. Almost three out of every four job opportunities in the Baltimore region occur in the counties surrounding Baltimore.⁴ Both labor pools and contractors who directly hire day laborers transport workers to these job sites. Pools, which usually maintain a fleet of vans, regularly charge both the workers and the contractors for transportation to and from the job site. Contractors may do the same. Sometimes the contractor, after dropping the laborer off at the work site, fails to return to the site at the end of the day, and the laborer absorbs the expense of getting back home.

The Findings

SAME TYPE OF LABOR MARKET, DIFFERENT LABORERS

While immigrant and non-immigrant laborers find themselves trapped in the same temporary, contingent labor market, each group experiences a distinct set of obstacles. Based on its interviews with 20 day laborers, CASA found that Latino workers came to the United States because when they can find work, they earn in one week what it takes a much longer amount of time to earn in their home country, where it is more difficult to find a job. The workers came to Baltimore to reunite with family members or to be with extended family who lived here. The workers also typically use their earnings to support family members who remain in

their home country. The money they send covers staples such as food and medicine.

These Latino day laborers face additional challenges such as language barriers, unfamiliarity with workplace rights and how to enforce them, and an increased vulnerability to employer exploitation because of their real or perceived lack of immigration status. These factors make it easy for unscrupulous contractors to break oral contracts brokered on street corners and to remain anonymous or otherwise unaccountable when they violate the workers' rights.

HPRP's survey of 105 labor pool workers in Baltimore indicates that 96 percent are African-American, and 88 percent are male. Three-quarters (76 percent) are over the age of 36. A surprising number of labor pool workers are educated: 81 percent of those surveyed claim to have at least a high school diploma or GED. Two-thirds of the respondents had been working in the labor pools for three years or less, with 40 percent of all respondents indicating less than one year's experience with the pools.

While 63 percent of the respondents reported that they attempt to support others (beside themselves) with their labor pool earnings, 73 percent reported they were single and 86 percent indicated they were not under a court order to pay child support. The reasons given by most workers for using the pools revolve around two central themes: exit from a permanent job and the immediate need for money. Nearly half (43 percent) of labor pool workers interviewed cited a lack of transportation as a major obstacle to securing permanent employment. Nearly all (93 percent) interviewed would prefer a permanent job with regu-

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lar hours.

Baltimore's labor pool workers appear to suffer from a widespread perception that they possess lower skill and energy levels and higher rates of substance abuse than their Latino counterparts. While such generalizations must be investigated empirically in further studies, it is safe to say that removal of the personal and individual obstacles confronting each group would not change the landscape of a labor market that increasingly relies on contingent, low-wage workers. The demand for cheap, exploitable labor will continue to exert its pressure on whom ever constitutes the potential labor force. Absent worker organizing, legislative reforms or other strong interventions, the same abusive conditions will persist.

DIFFERENT LABORERS, SAME COMPLAINTS: WAGES, HEALTH AND SAFETY AND TREATMENT

Whether employed by a labor pool or directly by a contractor, day laborers in Baltimore generally cited wages, workplace safety, and workplace treatment as their primary concerns.

Wages

In a recent study of day laborers in the New York City region, 23 researchers found that 50 percent of that area's day laborers had experienced non-payment of wages, and 56 percent had been paid less than the agreed rate. In the Southern California study, nearly 48 percent of the respondents (478 day laborers at 87 sites) reported at least one instance of nonpayment of wages.⁵ This study found that immigrant and African-American Baltimore day laborers are underpaid for their work, typically earning less than permanent employees per-



Some labor pools have attempted to unlawfully limit overtime payment to those instances when an individual works for more than 40 hours a week with a single contractor.



forming the same work. The labor pools that employ African-Americans generally pay \$6.50 per hour or less to the worker, while collecting roughly twice that amount from the contractor. On the other hand, although immigrants who perform construction work frequently negotiate hourly wage rates well above \$6.50, they often do not receive their wages or are paid substantially less than the agreed-upon wage. CASA has represented thousands of workers in recovering back wages withheld by construction contractors — usually involving both the first week of work (wages ostensibly "put into the hole") and the last two weeks. Each year, CASA represents more than 600 day laborers who have not been paid their earned wages. Immigrant workers also experience unlawful wage deductions for repairs to damaged or missing equipment.

Deductions for transportation, protective clothing and boots, or check-cashing and other "services" are common practices at labor pools, and, at

times, among contractors who directly hire their workers as well. On average, labor pools charge each worker \$5 to \$7 per day for round-trip transportation. At the same time, pools do not pay workers for their wait time either at the pool or on the jobsite. Most labor pool workers can recount instances where vans never returned to pick them up, or when they were forced to wait two or three hours in hostile neighborhoods for a ride back to Baltimore. Tales of drunk or lost van drivers also are common.

Overtime wages, set by law at one and one-half times the regular wage rate, also are the subject of numerous day labor complaints. Some labor pools have attempted to unlawfully limit overtime payment to those instances when an individual works for more than 40 hours a week with a single contractor. Immigrant workers often tolerate overtime violations to remain employed, or simply accept employers' statements that they do not pay overtime compensation.

Safety

Construction work is the most common assignment for day laborers. Traditionally, it has been the most dangerous employment in the U.S., yielding an average workers' compensation claim rate of 8.4 injuries per 100 workers in 1999. This is three times the employment-related death rate faced by police officers and detectives. Day laborers, however, are at greater risk than permanent workers. Labor Ready, which operates a national chain of labor pools, recorded a rate of 25.7 injuries per 100 workers.⁶ National statistics reveal that Latino men are now the demographic group most likely to die on the job, averaging almost eight times as many workplace deaths as U.S.-born workers. A Guatemalan worker who participated

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in this study reported having seen three co-workers die at construction sites in the United States.

This study also found that many Baltimore day laborers do not receive the same safety equipment as the full-time employees working beside them. In addition, employers typically fail to provide any safety training. Often, when day laborers are injured on the job, they do not file a worker's compensation claim for a variety of reasons, including fear of retaliation or not having sufficient information to list their employer's name and address on the workers' compensation form. Claims are often denied by administrative law judges pursuant to the statute's "casual employee" exemption. While the loophole does not apply to labor pool workers, who have been brought under the statute by judicial decisions, immigrant day laborers typically are without legal recourse when they are injured on the job.

Treatment

Day laborers also suffer frequent mistreatment on the job. They report verbal assaults from supervisors and labor pool dispatchers. In addition, they report often being required to perform repugnant and dangerous work that permanent employees reject, being denied breaks for water or food, and being pressured to maintain an unreasonably fast work pace. Many labor pool halls and worksites lack restrooms and access to water.

Day laborers typically have little or no detailed information about the nature of their job assignment until they arrive at the worksite. Written directions are rarely provided. After being transported by the labor pool or contractor to the job-

site, day laborers have little recourse if they find the work too dangerous, objectionable, or different from that described.

As if to ensure that day laborers remain in such conditions, labor pools regularly prohibit the contractors from permanently hiring the temporary workers. Contractors are frequently bound by written agreements not to hire such workers for a period of one year after the temporary work assignment, at the risk of a \$1,000 liquidated damages penalty payable to the labor pool.

The Recommendations

This report offers recommendations for Baltimore City based upon short-term and long-term goals. These recommendations were identified by the workers who participated in this report. They also include some recommendations contained in the proposed national Day Laborer Fairness and Protection Act. In addition, they are based upon CASA's and HPRP's direct experience represent-



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ing and organizing day laborers in Baltimore. The recommendations, if enacted, would allow Baltimore to emerge as a national model for welcoming and protecting immigrant and U.S.-born day laborers, and recognizing their contributions to the city's economy and culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BALTIMORE CITY

Short Term Goals

1. Provide operational funding and a city-owned building for Baltimore's day laborers to renovate and use as a safe location to find jobs, receive workplace rights, education and health and safety training, and to develop their skills.
2. Clarify that city agencies will not inquire into the immigration status of any worker unless specifically required to do so by federal law or regulations. Also, clarify that city agencies will accept consular documents, such as the matricula consular, as valid proofs of identify.
3. Commit and dedicate resources to prosecuting employers for cases of theft of services or willful violations of the Maryland Wage and Hour Law and the Maryland Wage Payment and Collection Law.⁷
4. Ensure that all agencies concerned with workplace rights provide services that are accessible to Spanish-speaking individuals and materials written in Spanish.
5. Encourage reforms in federal and state law through resolutions and lobbying activities to:
 - a. obtain a pathway to earned citi-

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- zanship for thousands of hard-working immigrants in the area;
 - b. assure access to driver's licenses for all residents regardless of immigration status; and
 - c. increase state and federal funding for worker education, workplace health and safety training, and wage and hour enforcement.
6. The Baltimore City Wage Commission should:
- a. distribute a specific statement to immigrant community centers that it will investigate non-payment of wage cases without investigating into the workers' immigration status;
 - b. hire bilingual staff; and
 - c. actively advertise its services in the day laborer community.
7. Businesses that contract with temp agencies should adopt a code of conduct that states they will ensure all their workers:
- a. have a safe work environment;
 - b. receive fair wages; and
 - c. have the right to organize.

Long-Term Goals

In conjunction with a nationwide grassroots initiative among day laborers, U.S. Representative Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) introduced the Day Laborer Fairness and Protection Act. This legislation targets the most glaring problems that day laborers face, including lack of overtime compensation, reduction in the promised wage rate, nonpayment of wages, exposure to dangerous working conditions, lack of safety training and protection, and exemptions from workers' compensation coverage in many

states. While it is unlikely that the Day Laborer Fairness and Protection Act will pass in the near future, Baltimore, along with other jurisdictions, could help build momentum for this and other legislation that would increase the rights of vulnerable workers.

Baltimore City should:

1. Set a wage rate for day laborers that would be comparable to that of full-time workers at the same jobsite who have the same experience and qualifications.
2. Require employers to pay laborers for their travel time and significant waiting time.
3. Prohibit day labor agencies from:
 - a. charging employers "placement fees" if they hire temporary workers;
 - b. prohibiting employers from hiring day laborers as fulltime employee; and
 - c. charging fees to workers for transportation, safety equipment, check cashing and other services.
4. Require day labor agencies to:
 - a. be licensed;
 - b. provide public access areas with restrooms and water; and
 - c. tell workers in writing, before the start of a work shift, what jobs are available, the wage rate, the hours to be worked, and a detailed explanation of how workers will be chosen for jobs.
5. Require all employers of day laborers to:
 - a. register with the City;
 - b. provide written documentation that includes the employer's

name, company name (if any), telephone number, address and workers' compensation carrier, the wage rate, the type of work to be performed, the work hours, and the address of the jobsite;

- c. pay their workers at the end of each workday if the job lasts less than one week's, and at the end of each week to the job lasts between 7 and 14 days.
 - d. pay time-and-a-half to laborers who work more than eight hours in a single day and double-time for hours worked beyond 12 hours in a workday; and
 - e. pay a minimum of four hours, unless the person is regularly scheduled to work for a shorter shift.
6. Increase funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction and other job training courses.

CASA: Protecting Workers' Rights in Baltimore

CASA's mission is to improve the social and economic well-being of the Latino community in Maryland. Since 1985, CASA has evolved into the state's largest Latino nonprofit agency. In addition to legal and organizing resources, today CASA provides a wide range of educational courses, health services, employment placement, social services, and advocacy activities from six locations in Maryland.⁸ In 1990, CASA began organizing day laborers who sought work on a street corner to protect their rights. Three years later, CASA opened a permanent day laborer center in East Silver Spring, where employers register before hiring workers and the

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workers actively participate in setting the Center's rules and priorities. At the Center, workers have established wage rates for each job category, created an equitable process for employers to hire workers, and volunteer by greeting employers, managing the waiting list of workers, and recruiting potential employers. At the Center workers learn about their rights, study English, have access to health education, on-site health services and other essential services. The Center also houses CASA's legal program, the Employment Rights Project, which focuses on recovering unpaid wages for day laborers and domestic workers. While CASA's legal program does not charge fees to clients, each worker signs a retainer agreement to complete 20 hours of "Time Dollars," or community service, in exchange for the legal representation. Workers earn their hours by working on their own cases, participating in collective actions to defend the rights of other workers, such as protests in front of unscrupulous employers' homes, and advocacy campaigns to advance the rights of immigrants and workers.

In response to the type of violations described in this report, in 2002, CASA of Maryland extended its work to Baltimore to provide legal and organizing resources to the area's growing population of Latino day laborers and other low-wage immigrant workers. With start-up funding from the Open Society Institute, CASA hired an attorney and organizer to train and mobilize workers to address their workplace problems. CASA's Baltimore office is currently working with approximately 100 individuals on unpaid wage cases. Most of the current cases involve an employer's failure to pay workers anything from

one day's wages to wages for several weeks of work. In 2003, CASA's Baltimore office recovered more than \$100,000 in unpaid wages on individual claims ranging from \$80 to \$2,000.

Homeless Persons Representation Project: Making the Invisible Visible

HPRP is a legal service provider with a mission to eliminate, ameliorate, and prevent homelessness. To accomplish its mission, HPRP sends staff and volunteer attorneys to places where persons living in poverty congregate (shelters, day labor pools, welfare offices) and provides direct representation in legal disputes. Similar to CASA, HPRP's advocacy efforts have developed grassroots organizing among labor pool workers. These efforts facilitated the creation of a weekly meeting of labor pool workers at a Baltimore homeless shelter. The group, known as the United Workers' Association (UWA), is an organization of low-wage workers and day laborers with the mission of fighting for better wages and working conditions. Their efforts include the filing of a complaint to state authorities about the lack of restrooms at Just Temps, a petition to Phoenix Medical Waste about safety conditions, and the launching of their "End Sweatshop Baseball" campaign. This effort has aimed to expose the use of day labor pools to clean up after home games at Camden Yards. The campaign began in earnest with a protest at the stadium on July 3, 2003. One worker noted, "We went to Camden Yards and protested so people will know that we are not just going to go away. There are real people cleaning up your peanut shells for less than minimum wage, and people in Baltimore and Maryland need to realize that and wake up..."

During the summer of 2004, the UWA began talks with the Maryland

Stadium Authority (MSA) to resolve the abuses that take place at Camden Yards as well as at the M&T Bank Stadium, where the same day labor agencies have been contracted to clean up after games. The MSA agreed to investigate abuses at the two stadiums. These abuses include workers not getting paid for all hours worked, unsanitary working conditions and sexual harassment. As of this writing the MSA has not taken action to remedy the abuses at either stadium.

UWA leader Jether Jones reflects on the work ahead: "We are hopeful that changes can be made in the labor pool industry... if only because we will not rest until workers' human rights are recognized by corporations who are hiring from the temp agencies. I can't imagine the people of Baltimore wanting anything other than to resolve these problems. After all there just should not be this kind of phenomenon where you have huge numbers of workers who must resort to doubling up at a relative's house or stay at a shelter to survive. There is something fundamentally wrong with this. As with the Stadium Authority, we are looking for leadership from the community that is willing to right these wrongs and end the day labor sweatshop conditions."

Endnotes

¹ In this article the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably, although CASA of Maryland primarily uses Latino to refer to persons who were born or have ancestry in Latin America.

² The increase of an immigrant workforce in the United States, particularly Hispanic men, has played a role in this growth of the labor pool industry, although most Hispanic day laborers in Baltimore do not use the formal labor pools. Nationwide, Hispanic men are over-represented in temporary help and day labor work arrangements, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

³ In Baltimore, this trend is evidenced by the fact that TOPS, which was founded just after World

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War II, and practically stood alone in the city’s labor pool industry for 40 years thereafter, must now compete in a crowded field. In addition to Labor Ready, TOPS now vies with a regionally owned chain, Ready Staffing, as well as locally owned pools such as Just Temps/Personnel Plus, Metro, and WorkForce USA. An estimated 3,000 to 5,000 labor pool workers are active each day in Baltimore. TOPS estimates that 7,000 to 10,000 workers pass through its doors annually. While TOPS repeatedly decries any claim that it is profitable, Labor Ready reported a net profit of roughly \$23 million in 2000, and was named by Kiplingers Personal Finance as the fourth best performing stock of the 1990s, with a stunning 17,669 percent return on investment.

⁴ The Job Opportunities Task Force, BALTIMORE’S CHOICE: Workers and Jobs for a Thriving Economy, January 2003, p. 7, Table 2 & p. 21, Table 3.

⁵ Dr. Abel Valenzuela, Day Laborers in Southern California, p. 15, Table 13. This statistic does not include other common abuses suffered by day laborers such as partial payment or underpayment of promised wages, and the employer’s issuance of checks with insufficient funds. For more research on day laborers nationwide, see the website of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, www.ndlon.org.

⁶ “Safety is not a Temporary Value.” 2001

⁷ Maryland’s Wage Payment and Collection Law, MD ANN.CODE, Labor - Employment §§ 3-501 et seq., establishes that an employee may recover up to three times the amount of wages owed when the employer’s failure to pay wages is not the result of a bona fide dispute.

⁸ ⁹ For more information about CASA, see www.casademaryland.org. While in Baltimore the vast majority of day laborers who have sought assistance at CASA have been Latino, CASA’s Silver Spring programs serve a large number of immigrants from around the world, especially Africa, as well as U.S.-born day laborers.

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relief to the Community Law Center, an inventive, knowledgeable and energetic resource, which has taken on the role in Baltimore City life of providing support for the development and sustainability of all Baltimore City neighborhoods.

Exactly how is Community Law Center accomplishing this, day by day?

Its programming provides pro-bono community legal services, help with ending predatory real estate practices, and legal support for resolving environmental issues and small business development. It has brought into being three significant State laws that give hundreds of community associations the tools to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods: Vacant Housing Nuisance Law; Drug Nuisance Law; and Community Bill of Rights.

This large and challenging can-do agenda came into being largely through the efforts of Anne Blumenberg. Twenty years ago Ms. Blumenberg was convinced that community organizations played a critical role in the development and sustainability of neighborhoods. She conceived the idea that they needed the advice and advocacy power of attorneys, so as to find ways to use the law to improve community conditions. Legal services organizations traditionally represent individual clients. And while federal law prohibits some from representing groups, most choose not to depart from the tradition of representing only individual clients.

In 1986, Ms. Blumemberg formed the Community Law Center as a non-profit law office to provide legal assistance to low-income communities and faith-based organizations. The Center has grown into a vibrant legal practice both creating and implementing legal



The Abell Foundation salutes Anne Blumenberg for her commitment to helping neighborhoods solve problems and for creating and leading the Community Law Center.



tools to help neighborhood residents combat the proliferation of vacant abandoned housing and crime that drives abandonment and disinvestment. The Community Law Center remains today as the key legal services organization in Baltimore dedicated to strengthening Baltimore City neighborhoods.

The results of the Center’s work make themselves known day by day in neighborhoods across Baltimore City, in the way neighborhood life changes – as nuisance activities are addressed, and vacant houses are renovated and reoccupied—all of which generate pride and stimulate investment.

The Abell Foundation salutes Anne Blumenberg for her commitment to helping neighborhoods solve problems, and for creating and leading the Community Law Center.

Jackie Cornish, executive director of the Druid Heights Community Center, makes the case: “When the Center is at work for your neighborhood, you know it. Just walk down the street!”

The full report, Baltimore’s Day Laborer Report: Their Stolen Sweat, is available on the Homeless Persons Representation Project’s website at www.hprplaw.org and CASA of Maryland’s website at www.casademaryland.org.