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Elected Officials Need to Hold Developers and Contractors Accountable

On May 4, 2022, workers on the 200-acre Vikings Lakes project being developed in Eagan, MN, by the Wilf family's development and construction firm, MV Ventures, made their wage theft complaint public. They alleged they are owed over \$100,000 in wages for work performed on the project. Five months later, a worker from the Vikings Lakes project has come forward stating she was repeatedly harassed and brutally raped while working for a subcontractor hired by MV Ventures.

Today, we are speaking out and calling upon local elected officials, developers, contractors, and all workers to take steps to ensure that contractors with public records of sexual misconduct, wage theft, worker misclassification, child labor or discrimination are held accountable for exploiting workers. Along with The Advocates for Human Rights, Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha and prominent advocates for fair treatment of immigrants, women, and the exploited, we stand ready to engage with any developer who is proactive in learning about why this happens and how to prevent it from happening again.

MV Ventures previously issued a response to the claims of wage theft claiming all their contractors signed agreements assuring fair labor practices would be enforced on the Viking Lakes site. They ended their statement noting that any contractor who breached their contract should be held accountable. "Given last week's story, it is past time for lip service. It's time for real accountability," said Adam Duininck, Director of Government Affairs with the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters. "Developers choose these contractors but can no longer be allowed to ignore their responsibility that accompanies that decision. It's the developers who must ensure their contractors are abiding by labor laws by having a presence on their own projects and speaking to the employees and contractors. If one of the most powerful families in Minnesota is not stepping up to prevent horrific worker abuse, it's time for local governments and the state legislature to step in."

MV Ventures was repeatedly warned that contractors on their project had a record of violating workers' rights. This recent story further demonstrates their failure to meaningfully address the issues taking place on their jobsite. MV Ventures demonstrated a lack of concern for dozens of workers who were victims of wage theft. They have every ability to step up and make these workers whole instead of waiting for the taxpayers to foot the bill for a lengthy investigation involving wage theft on their project. They have every ability to acknowledge a victim of sexual assault on one of their projects and engage with workers' rights organizations and women's rights organizations to prevent it from ever happening again.



NCSRCC is calling upon local elected officials to require accountability measures on all approved projects to ensure workers are not being exploited in their cities. If developers are going to prioritize their own profits at the expense of workers' physical safety and economic security, then our elected officials must place compliance requirements on these projects that hold developers and contractors accountable. These measures would likely prevent the types of incidents that occurred on the MV Ventures' Viking Lakes project with tragic results.

"It's time for real oversight on these construction projects," said Barb Pecks, Business Representative for NCSRCC and Chairwoman of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters' Sisters in the Brotherhood committee. "Many developers have become driven by greed with no regard for workers and taxpayers. Unfortunately, these stories you have read about lately are all too common, and most victims are afraid to come forward. Our tradeswomen have every right to feel safe in the workplace. It is no longer acceptable to be a bystander. These are people. They are human beings, and we must all work together to protect their safety and stand up for their dignity."

NCSRCC is beginning to roll out training to turn bystanders into advocates. We will be working with our signatory contractors and developers on supporting and advocating for a trained workforce that is not afraid to speak out and hold abusers accountable. We do our part to be the best trained and safest workforce. Now, we will also be the model for workers who do not tolerate this unethical and unprofessional behavior on the worksite.

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North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters (NCSRCC) represents 27,000 members in 36 Locals and 17 training centers throughout Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Members in the six-state area include carpenters, industrial workers, interior systems carpenters, millwrights, pile drivers and floor coverers.