



NEWS RELEASE

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Does “Caring for the Community” Include Working Families?

Abavia Worker Center Launches Investigation Against CommunicAID Project

ABAVIA, Ohio – April 27, 2017 – CommunicAID’s motto, “Caring for the Community,” stands in stark contrast to the exploitative working conditions associated with the construction of its new multimillion-dollar Mercer Street complex. The Abavia Worker Center (AWC) is investigating the employment practices of Anderson and Lee, the architectural firm chosen to lead CommunicAID’s project, for alleged wage theft and workplace discrimination.

In 2007, AWC successfully pressured Abavia’s city council to adopt a living wage ordinance for publicly-funded construction projects. Because the sources of funding for CommunicAID’s project come from the state housing authority, Abavia’s city council, and a federal loan, the workers associated with the project – according to AWC – should earn a living wage. Anderson and Lee, however, hires subcontractors for some of its work and these employees aren’t paid living wages. Workers completing construction for CommunicAID’s project have also claimed workplace discrimination.

Anderson and Lee argues that it is a completely separate entity from its subcontracted companies, and therefore is not accountable for the subcontractors’ business practices. AWC asserts that Anderson and Lee is ultimately responsible because it receives lump payments from CommunicAID, in which a portion is then distributed to subcontractors. The subcontracted workers, according to AWC, are basically indirect employees of Anderson and Lee. AWC claims that Anderson and Lee is guilty of “wage theft,” a term for the illegal denial of wages that are rightfully owed to an employee.

“AWC stands for justice everywhere, from lack of housing to economic inequality, but we will not turn a blind eye while wage theft and discrimination are committed against hardworking Abavia community members,” said AWC Executive Director Angela Hayek. “We cannot ignore exploitation of workers in the name of promoting another just cause. All struggles for justice are linked. CommunicAID must pressure Anderson and Lee to pay its workers the wages they are legally obligated – subcontracted or not – otherwise, AWC will take legal action and a new architectural firm that respects workers should be appointed to complete the project. So I ask CommunicAID, does “Caring for the Community” include working families?”

AWC’s investigation is of interest to the nonprofit industry – as it is rare to see nonprofits come into conflict – and could have legal implications for the regulation and rights of subcontracted employees.

The Abavia Worker Center (AWC) is a member-led organization formed in 2002 to educate, empower, and mobilize working families throughout the Abavia community. The nonprofit organization emphasizes the eradication of economic inequality. For more information visit www.AWC.org