

Peninsula, South Bay salon chain sued by immigrant workers

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Body

SAN MATEO -- **Immigrant workers** at a **chain** of nail **salons** in the **South Bay** and on the **Peninsula** were forced to pay for accidentally broken bottles of nail polish and had to turn over a portion of their tips to managers, according to a lawsuit filed Tuesday.

The **workers** at Natalie **Salon** locations in San Mateo, Redwood City, Menlo Park, Palo Alto and Los Gatos would sometimes work seven days a week without legally mandated overtime pay, said Winnie Kao, an attorney representing them. Management routinely kept 20 percent of tips left for the **workers** on credit card payments and didn't allow them to take a lunch break, according to the suit filed Tuesday in San Mateo County Superior Court.

Anh Dong, a co-owner of the **chain**, referred questions Tuesday to a man she described as her brother. When reached by phone, the man said he would comment later on the suit.

Kao, who works for San Francisco-based watchdog group Asian Law Caucus, said the **workers** are all Vietnamese women who have been in the United States for various periods of time. They are among many Asian women who have gravitated toward the nail and beauty industry, she said. Kao said the training is relatively quick, English language skills are not essential, and **workers** have the comfort of being with compatriots.

However, managers are accused of fining Natalie **Salon workers** for small infractions like gathering at the front desk or failing to record that a foot bath had been cleaned. Kao contends these wage garnishments are illegal. **Workers** also had their pay docked due to minor accidents, like breaking a nail polish bottle during the course of work -- even when it wasn't their fault.

"It is kind of crazy to be docked for your customers' dropping nail polish," Kao said. "It is a completely innocuous accident."

The women began talking to one another and eventually sought help at an outreach event put on by the Asian Law Caucus. Kao said she has not tabulated the potential amount of money owed to the women and declined to estimate. However, she said she believes at least 50 **workers** have been subjected to such treatment.

So far, three current employees -- Bich Pham, Lilian Nguyen and Evelyn Nguyen -- have joined the suit. Former **worker** Vicky Tran is also a plaintiff in the case. They are asking to be certified as a class so they can pursue a class-action lawsuit. The women have asked for a jury trial.

"By bringing this case, I just want Natalie **Salon** to correctly pay me and the other women who work there for the work that we've done and to follow the law," plaintiff Vicky Tran said in a written statement.

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