



**Iowa
Citizens for
Community
Improvement**

We talk. We act. We get it done.

CATHOLIC  **WORKER**

Office of the Governor
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Office of the Attorney General of Iowa
Hoover State Office Building
1305 E. Walnut Street
Des Moines IA 50319

Office of U.S. Senators Charles Grassley and Joni Ernst
721 Federal Building
210 Walnut Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

January 23, 2020

Dear Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, Attorney General Tom Miller, and U.S. Senators Charles Grassley and Joni Ernst:

Last year, Western Iowa Community Tech College, J&L Staffing, and Sioux City-area corporations Tur-Pak and Royal Canin exploited dozens of international students from Chile and Brazil by luring them to western Iowa with promises of free tuition, housing, and food, two year associates degrees, and specialized, skilled job training.

When the students arrived in Iowa they found themselves suddenly saddled with thousands of dollars of debt in the form of hidden financial assistance and scholarship fees, then forced into low-wage factory work to pay them off.

The method of exploitation was a thinly-veiled contractual scheme of mandatory, full-time and overtime factory work, disguised as cultural exchange internships. Every penny in wages the international students earned above the Iowa state minimum wage was skimmed off the top and kicked back to the school in scholarship reimbursement, with little or no transparency or honest communication. Other promises such as free food were also broken.

The school's abuse of the J1 Visa program was possibly illegal from the start - and school officials and both state and federal regulators may have known it. The Iowa Department of Education and the U.S. State Department both intervened in the school's operation of the program, resulting in the collapse of the internship exchanges, and forcing the college's form of debt repayment out into the open. Students filed complaints and attempted to negotiate with WIT on several occasions.

To date, the directly impacted international students have not received justice and are currently at a high-risk for continued wage theft, forced labor, debt repayment, eviction, and deportation. As elected officials and lawmakers you must guarantee the safety of the impacted international students - no more wage theft, no more debt, no evictions, and no deportations.

We believe there may be enough evidence in the public record to file felony criminal charges against Western Iowa Tech Community College, J&L Services, Tur-Pak, and Royal Canin, including all of their top directors, executives, and presidents.

We call on you to open an independent and transparent investigation into the human rights abuses at Western Iowa Tech immediately. We believe additional evidence held by the school, the implicated private companies, and the relevant state and federal regulators is critical to a full understanding of the potential crimes that may have been committed by this suspected human trafficking ring. These records and documents must see the light of day immediately.

The directly impacted students are the survivors of potentially very serious felony human trafficking and wage theft crimes, and they should all be guaranteed:

1. long-term residency in the United States, for any who want it,

2. cancellation of all scholarship and financial assistance debt,
3. free college and transfer credit to any state university or college in Iowa,
4. the back payment of all stolen wages.

Signed,

Directly-Impacted WIT and J1-Visa International Students
and their friends and supporters