

Laguna Beach Is Sued Over Day Laborer Center

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October 4, 2006 - A conservative advocacy group filed a lawsuit against Laguna Beach on Tuesday, alleging the city is violating federal law by helping undocumented workers find jobs.

The lawsuit was filed in Orange County Superior Court on behalf of Laguna Beach residents Eileen Garcia and her husband, George Riviere. The lawsuit was filed by Judicial Watch, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank that has filed similar suits elsewhere.

In the Laguna Beach suit, Garcia and Riviere allege the city is violating federal law by spending public funds to operate the Laguna Day Worker Center on Laguna Canyon Road, where mostly Spanish-speaking workers, among them illegal immigrants, find jobs and get English language instruction.

The lawsuit asks a judge to halt the city's funding of the center.

"We bought our home in Laguna at the height of the market," Garcia said. "We pay \$28,000 in property taxes. I don't want that money to pay for illegal activity."

Although the immigration law is federal, the lawsuit was filed in state court because it alleges that local tax dollars are being illegally spent, said Judicial Watch attorney Candice Jackson.

The litigation is just one of the ways anti-illegal immigrant activists are fighting day labor centers around Southern California. Illegal immigrants rely on such centers to find jobs that usually pay less than \$10 an hour.

Garcia has repeatedly protested in front of the center and at other locations with the citizen border patrol group, the Minuteman Project.

In September 2005, Judicial Watch filed a similar lawsuit in Herndon County, Va., and has challenged the city of Los Angeles' mandate that

requires police not to question suspects they arrest about their immigration status until after criminal charges have been made.

Laguna Beach City Manager Ken Frank said the city had given about \$22,000 annually for the last five years to the Cross Cultural Council, which operates the center.

Beginning about 10 years ago, workers were referred to the center, just out of town on Laguna Canyon Road, after the city banned soliciting work from public streets because the dayworkers were bothering residents, Frank said.

"It's not the perfect solution," Frank said. "All I know is the federal government does not have the capacity or the will to handle this local problem.

"We can't bury our heads in the sand and say these people aren't here."