**MALDEF files class action lawsuit against Southern California car washes**

By [**Ruxandra Guidi**](http://www.scpr.org/about/people/staff/ruxandra-guidi) | May 21, 2012

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Jose Sanchez of Santa Monica joined a protest at Santa Monica Car Wash where union officials and community leaders rallied on Monday, May 21.



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A worker at Santa Monica Car Wash polishes the exterior of a customer's car. Union activists and community leaders rallied at the wash on Monday, May 21.



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Maria Elena Durazo, executive secretary-treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, addressed the crowd at Santa Monica Car Wash where union officials and community leaders rallied Monday, May 21.



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Marcial Carmona (left) is one of four plaintiffs in a lawsuit against three Santa Monica washes. He attended a rally on Monday, May 21.



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Union supporters listened to speeches at Santa Monica Car Wash where union officials and community leaders rallied Monday, May 21.



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Victor Viramontes, national senior counsel for MALDEF, addressed reporters at a rally on Monday, May 21.



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Union acitivists and clergy pray after a rally at Santa Monica Car Wash where union officials and community leaders gathered on Monday, May 21.



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Workers at Santa Monica Car Wash put the finishing touches on a car on Monday, May 21.



Grant Slater/KPCC

A worker at Santa Monica Car Wash does detail work on a customer's car. Union activists and community leaders rallied at the wash on Monday, May 21.



Grant Slater/KPCC

Plaintiffs in a class-action lawsuit against car wash owners stand side-by-side at a protest on Monday, May 21.

A civil rights organization has filed a class-action lawsuit against Southland car washes, [this time](http://www.scpr.org/news/2012/01/11/30771/carwash-owner-makes-million-dollar-settlement-work/) alleging pay, health and safety violations.

The [CLEAN Carwash Campaign](http://www.cleancarwashla.org/), a coalition that works on behalf of low-wage earners, calls Southern [California car](http://www.scpr.org/news/2012/05/21/32517/maldef-files-class-action-lawsuit-against-southern/) washes the “new sweatshops.”

The group says car wash businesses that employ up to 100 manual laborers routinely hire Latino workers and violate their protections under the [California Wage and Hour Law](http://www.dir.ca.gov/labor_law.html).

MALDEF ([The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund](http://www.maldef.org/)) [has filed a lawsuit](http://media.scpr.org/documents/2012/05/21/For_web-_MALDEF_SUIT_x-wrap_is_edited_below_and_in_P%22) in Los Angeles Superior Court against three car washes under the same management.

“These car washes, in order to make their business more profitable, aren’t paying the workers the wages that they’re entitled to," said Victor Viramontes, MALDEF's national senior counsel. "They’re not giving them overtime, they’re making them work off the clock, they’re shortcutting the pay across the board. That’s pretty much the way the industry has been set up, and that’s not acceptable.”

Viramontes said the class-action lawsuit seeks back wages for 100 workers it claims the owners deprived of required breaks, lunch time and overtime pay.

The suit also claims carwash owners forced the employees to clock out before they finished their shifts.

Under California law, [immigration status](http://www.scpr.org/news/2012/05/21/32517/maldef-files-class-action-lawsuit-against-southern/) is irrelevant to a worker’s ability to recover lost wages. The state attorney general’s lawsuit on other car wash workers’ behalf led to the first union car washes in the Southland last fall.

Management at the three car wash businesses in Santa Monica and Venice declined interview requests for this story.