

## LGBT IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

Immigration Equality is a national organization that helps advance equal immigration rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and HIV-positive community.

Founded in 1994, the nonprofit advocates for LGBT people living in the United States and abroad who have been persecuted based on their sexual orientation, transgender identity or HIV status. Immigration Equality aids those seeking asylum, and provides resources to support advocates, attorneys and those threatened by discriminatory laws.

Immigration Equality works with victims of prejudice from all over the world, but many of its recent clients come from Jamaica and Latin America.

"In the case of Jamaica, some of our clients have had their houses burned down, are lit on fire or are chased by mobs," says Victoria Nielsen, the legal director at Immigration Equality.

The group promotes the Uniting American Families Act (UAF), which would allow committed same-sex partners to sponsor their significant others for the same immigration benefits offered to opposite-sex couples. The bill would affect 36,000 Americans and their partners in long-term relationships, Nielsen says.

The bill will be introduced this year to the new Congress.

To sign the petition in support of the bill, to volunteer to translate, or to learn how to visit a detainee, go to [www.immigrationequality.org](http://www.immigrationequality.org), or call (212) 714-2904.

—Ben Strauss



and place them—can be fired for any reason. What's more, they lack the legal protections guaranteed to other workers and make half as much as permanent workers.

Today, there are about 8.6 million dispatch workers in the country. Close to two-thirds of the work force does not have permanent employment status.

Kiryung hired mostly women. It gave three-month contracts to married women, presumably so they could be fired if they became pregnant. Unmarried women received six-month contracts. Management's policy was to fire one dispatch worker every week, to "keep the waters clean," according to an October report from the National Labor Committee, a New York-based labor research and advocacy group.

"People were fired for the pettiest reasons," says Seok-Soon Oh, a Kiryung worker. "The supervisor would just say he didn't like your face, you were too fat."

Managers sometimes wouldn't even tell them face-to-face that they were going to be fired. Pink slips would arrive via text message, says Hye-Won Chong, international director for the Korean Metal Workers Union, which represents the workers.

The National Labor Committee reported that Kiryung supervisors kept production quotas so high that women couldn't take bathroom breaks. Shifts could stretch to 38 hours, but workers received only two 10-minute breaks, in addition to meals.

"People were terrified. If you were sick, you took some pills and kept working," Oh says. "Once a co-worker collapsed and the boss sent her home, and said, 'Don't bother coming back.'"

Three years ago, when Kiryung tried to break the union by firing almost everyone in the plant, the women occupied the factory for 55 days. As is common in Korea, managers called in riot police and drove them off the premises. The strikers set up camp outside the main gate, where they have remained for three years.

This summer, 35 workers launched a hunger strike, and the union's leader stretched it to 94 days until she was carried to the hospital in late September. She then started her fast anew.

Unable to impress their demands on the factory's management, the strikers looked higher up the corporate food chain.



**South Korean workers protest alleged labor violations by Kiryung Electronics Factory, which builds Sirius Satellite radios.**

Since Kiryung's radios are sold exclusively to Sirius Satellite Radio, a delegation of Kiryung workers and union activists flew to New York in October to ask Sirius to force Kiryung to the bargaining table. Like many corporations, Sirius dictates terms to its suppliers, such as Kiryung. (Korean managers are reportedly now under pressure to shift production to China.)

Although Sirius didn't acknowledge its Korean visitors, no sooner did strikers show up at its Manhattan offices—with traditional drums and banners—that protesters learned company goons were stampeding through the strikers' encampment in Korea. Oh says the thugs stomped on and strangled some of the women strikers.

When Korea suffered its financial meltdown 11 years ago, the country's leaders accepted an International Monetary Fund-led bailout of \$58.4 billion to end the economic freefall. The program forced austerity on the country's workers to shore up "investor confidence."

One of the government's first steps was to dissolve the country's labor laws. Korea's industrial chieftains used the new rules to attack job security and pay. They fired waves of permanent workers and hired cheaper, non-union temporary workers to replace them. With more than 8 million temps in the country, it's no surprise Kiryung is fighting this group so intensely.

"They know millions of Korean workers are in the same situation," Oh says. "If we win, they can, too."

—Mischa Gaus

## Mo' Power for Low Power

**C**HICAGO—THE CHICAGO INDEPENDENT Radio Project (CHIRP), an all-volunteer radio group formed in 2007, will begin webcasting this winter—though millions of city residents who live close to the station won't be able to hear its programming.

That's because urban Low Power FM (LPFM) radio stations remain illegal.

In 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began accepting LPFM license applications from community groups around the country. But the broadcast lobby, including the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and National Public Radio (NPR) opposed opening up the airwaves. By the end of 2000, Congress—folding under industry pressure—passed the “Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act” to block urban LPFM stations, based on the radio industry's

need,” says Joe Torres, government relations manager for Free Press, a media reform organization. “There is no legitimate basis for NAB and NPR to claim that LPFM will interfere with broadcast stations.”

Since 2000, more than 800 rural LPFM stations have begun broadcasting. In some cases, they provide listeners with local emergency updates and information unavailable on commercial stations.

But urban groups like CHIRP are gearing up for swift passage next year of legislation that could finally bring independent community radio to a city near you.

The legislation, called the Local Community Radio Act, would allow the FCC to license hundreds of LPFM stations to broadcast in urban spectrums currently dominated by high-powered corporate signals, according to Cory Fischer-Hoffman of the Prometheus Radio Project, a grassroots organization that has been advocating for LPFM since 1998. Licenses for these stations—which can have a broadcast radius between three miles and seven miles—would be available to community groups, high schools, labor unions, churches and other nonprofits.

Despite bipartisan sponsorship on Capitol Hill, where it was introduced in both the House and Senate in June 2007, the bill never came up for a vote. That was because the presidential campaign and the financial crisis influenced Congress' priorities, says Fischer-Hoffman.

“We believe that in the next session we're going to be able to push it through in the first 100 days,” she says.

The bill's recent sponsors—Reps. Lee Terry (R-Neb.) and Mike Doyle (D-Pa.), and Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.)—plan to reintroduce it this year, spokespeople in their offices say. But none could say exactly when. Lisa Ellis, Terry's communications director, says the ongoing economic crisis will affect how quickly legislation can pass.

The NAB will likely continue to oppose bills that alter existing interference protections, says Kristopher Jones, an NAB spokesman. NPR did not respond to calls for comment, but in an April 2008 filing with the FCC, the nonprofit broadcaster opposed loosening technical restrictions on LPFM stations.

While stations await Congress to allow the FCC to hand out Low Power FM licenses, CHIRP is moving forward with its plans online. The group will focus on Chicago music and culture.

“We want it to be a conversation with the city,” CHIRP President Shawn Campbell says. “A Chicago-based station that welcomes listeners from everywhere.”

By February, CHIRP Radio will be webcasting at ChirpRadio.org, although the online station will limit its listenership because of expensive Internet royalty rates.

“There's no reason for us to wait around and see what may happen with federal legislation,” Campbell says. “Ultimately, at the end of the day, that's out of our hands.”

—Jeremy Gantz

## Bush's Final Purge

**T**HE BUSH ADMINISTRATION is reportedly using its final months in office to exact retribution on federal employees who have spoken out against agency policies during the past eight years.

Since April, the administration has dismissed—or notified of pending dismissal—more than a dozen federal whistleblowers, according to Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, founder of the civil rights group No Fear Coalition and director of the National Whistleblowers Center. Some have come as recently as November. They include staffers at the Departments of Commerce, Labor, Education and Transportation. And, Coleman-Adebayo says, those are only the employees who are willing to go on record.

“We have a much longer list,” she says. “A number of people have asked us not to share their names publicly as they are hoping to keep their government jobs.”

For Coleman-Adebayo, the firings are a “final act of retaliation” against employees—many of them longtime staffers—who have expressed dissent within President Bush's highly politicized federal agencies.

So far, the dismissals have flown largely under the radar. Representatives of the Government Accountability Project (GAP) and the Project on Government Oversight—prominent whistleblower advocacy groups—say they were unaware of the recent firings but were not surprised.

Jesselyn Radack, a former Justice De-



CHIRP President Shawn Campbell meets with volunteers on Nov. 20.

claim that adding 100-watt, low-power stations into the FM spectrum would endanger full-power broadcasters' signals.

However, in 2003 the Mitre Corporation, funded by a \$2 million grant from the government, found that LPFM stations do not interfere with the signals of existing full-power stations. In late 2007, the FCC recommended that Congress eliminate the interference regulation that blocked LPFM stations from entering urban airwaves.

“I don't know what more evidence they