

The Boston Globe

Paramount restaurant sued on overtime

Workers say they are shorted on pay

By [Katie Johnston](#) Globe Staff May 15, 2015



Bill Greene/Globe Staff/File

The Paramount restaurant is a 78-year-old Beacon Hill institution, serving up caramel and banana French toast to Sunday brunchgoers and shrimp tacos to the dinner crowd. But workers preparing the food, running the cash register, and doing the dishes say they are being paid in cash for overtime hours, without the time-and-a-half compensation they are entitled to, according to a lawsuit filed Friday in US District Court in Boston.

Several workers involved in the suit, which also includes the Paramount in South Boston, said they are not being paid at all for up to 20 hours of overtime work.

Massachusetts restaurants are not required to pay overtime under state law but still have to comply with the federal overtime law, which calls for extra compensation after 40 hours per week, said Shannon Liss-Riordan, the lawyer representing the Paramount workers.

Cashier Maria Adela Rivas said that along with her paycheck she gets an envelope of cash, usually around \$100, to pay for the 10 or so hours of overtime she works every week. Not only

are no taxes being taken out, she said, but she isn't getting the time-and-a-half wage — approximately \$50 extra a week — she's entitled to for overtime work.

“Everybody gets cash over the 40 hours,” said Rivas, 42, who lives in East Boston and supports her two children on her \$11-an-hour Paramount wages and tips, and food stamps. “I wish I could buy a house, but with that amount that I make a year, I can't.”

Owners Michael Conlon and Joseph Greene, whose restaurant group also operates the 21st Amendment near the State House, the Blarney Stone in Dorchester, and West on Centre in West Roxbury, did not return calls seeking comment Friday.

Wage theft is a growing problem around the country, according to the federal Department of Labor, and immigrants are particularly vulnerable because they are reluctant to speak out against their employers. Stiffing restaurant workers is “somewhat of a widespread practice” in Boston, said Alex Galimberti, lead organizer of the Restaurant Opportunities Center of Boston.

“It happens at every level,” he said, from casual establishments to high-end restaurants.

Liss-Riordan, the plaintiffs' lawyer, called the Paramount violations “blatant.”

“Employers think they can get away with taking advantage of low-wage workers, particularly immigrant workers,” she said, “because they don't think they're going to be challenged.”

Katie Johnston can be reached at katie.johnston@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@ktkjohnston](https://twitter.com/ktkjohnston).