

The Labor Recruiter Accountability Act of 2003  
Introductory Statement

The Honorable George Miller  
Of California  
In The House of Representatives  
November 19, 2003

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the “Labor Recruiter Accountability Act of 2003.”

As has been well documented in the press, the abuse of recruited workers has become a very serious problem in many areas of our nation. Labor contractors lure workers to the U.S. by promising them a better life with decent wages and good jobs in exchange for thousands of dollars in fees. Instead, tens of thousands of workers arrive in the U.S. only to find that they were cruelly deceived. If they are paid at all, they earn unlivable wages for menial jobs to which they never agreed, with no insurance or health care. And in addition to earning little, they are bound deeply in debt to the recruiter for bringing them to their new home.

This is not employment opportunity: it is indentured servitude. It is modern slavery. Hard as it may seem to believe, this form of indentured servitude is the disturbing reality for thousands of workers, and it should not be occurring in the United States in 2003.

Today, I am introducing the “Labor Recruiter Accountability Act of 2003” to fight this cruel practice by providing for tighter accountability for foreign labor contractors and employers.

The “Labor Recruiter Accountability Act of 2003” holds recruiters *and* employers responsible for the promises they make to prospective employees, and discourages employers from using disreputable recruiters. The bill requires employers and foreign labor contractors to inform workers of the terms and conditions of their employment at the time they are recruited. It makes employers jointly liable for violations committed by recruiters in their employ. It imposes fines on employers and recruiters who do not live up to their promises and authorizes the Secretary of Labor to take additional legal action to enforce those commitments. Employers and recruiters are prohibited from requiring or requesting recruitment fees from workers and are required to pay the costs, including subsistence costs, of transporting the worker.

The bill discourages disreputable labor contractors by requiring the Secretary of Labor to maintain a public list of labor contractors who have been involved in violations of the Act and by providing additional penalties if employers use a contractor listed by the Secretary as having been involved in previous violations of this Act and that contractor contributes to a violation for which the employer may be liable. The remedies provided under the “Labor Recruiter Accountability Act” are not exclusive, but are in addition to any other remedies workers may have under law or contract.

Is it too much to ask that people who live on American soil, making products for American consumption, be treated like American workers? Even the most basic respect for human rights demands that we act now to protect these workers.

I am pleased that over 30 of our colleagues have joined me as original cosponsors of this bill. I am hopeful that all of our colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, will add their support to this critical legislation to end this kind of despicable exploitation of workers in the United States once and for all. This legislation is also supported by the AFL-CIO, the National Council of La Raza, and the Farmworker Justice Fund. Mr. Speaker, I urge Members of the House to join me and co-sponsor the "Labor Recruiter Accountability Act of 2003."