

Employees of short-lived Portland sandwich shop say they were never paid

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Employees of a sandwich shop that opened and closed in the Portland's Old Port this summer say they were never paid for their work.

Pockets, which sold sandwiches 24 hours a day, opened on the corner of Fore and Market streets around the beginning of July and closed last week.



Pockets, a sandwich shop in the Old Port has closed. Derek Davis/Staff Photographer
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DrewChristopher Joy, executive director of the Southern Maine Workers' Center, said he knows of at least six people who didn't receive wages for the hours they worked at the sandwich shop this summer, but believes there are more.

A manager estimated that owner Dennis Caris owes his former employees about \$12,000 in total, Joy said.



Alexandra Rodriguez, 20, said she should have earned about \$500 for the hours she worked there in June and July.

Rodriguez, who has been staying with a friend and at the homeless shelter for teens in Portland, had hoped the \$11-an-hour job would enable her to get a place for and her 1-year-old son, who now lives with his father.

She received a housing assistance voucher this summer, but needs her own income in order to pay her share of the rent.

She doesn't know if she'll be able to find another job before her voucher expires.

Rodriguez said several of her former co-workers also came from the teen shelter and, despite working throughout the summer, are still there because they never got paid.

She said Caris first told them he couldn't give them checks because he didn't have the payroll set up yet. Then, he said they filled out their tax forms incorrectly. Rodriguez said he gave some of the employees part of what they earned with cash from the register, but not her.

"He never gave me a penny," she said.

Madeline Gillespie, 18, who was hired as cashier at the sandwich shop, said she worked from the end of June to the beginning of August, when she left after watching coffee machines get taken out of the shop by the supplier and seeing that Caris couldn't pay to have a boot removed from his car.

After sending Caris a letter demanding her wages and exposing the situation on Facebook, she said, Caris gave her a check for \$720 this month – what he said he owed her after accusing her of claiming to work more hours than she did.

Before then, Gillespie said, her boyfriend was able to cover the rent for their apartment in Portland. She said she's heard of others who lost their apartments because they missed rent payments.

Andy Schmidt, a Portland employment attorney, has been helping some of the employees connect with resources through the state to try to get paid and has informed the Department of Labor of the situation. He said he believes a lawsuit would be futile because the owner has no money.

Employees said Caris lived in Manchester, New Hampshire, but sometimes slept at the shop.

Caris was sentenced in 2011 to two years in jail with all but four months suspended for failing to pay \$35,860 in taxes received from sales at The Caris Landings, an inn and motel in Old Orchard Beach.

According to a new release from the Maine Attorney General's Office at the time, he was also convicted of felony bad check writing in 1991.

He didn't return a call seeking comment.

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