

# THE OAKBOOK

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## POLITICS

### Home Care Aide Speaks Out On Working Conditions



An Equal Voice sign announcing a meeting, photo courtesy of caseygrants

When Lisa Fang goes to bed at night, she's not sure she has a job to go to in the morning.

“Our employers call only when they need us. We don't have set working hours. I don't know when employers have a job for me,” she told an audience at a recent community forum sponsored by the Equal Voice for America's Families. She was describing the insecure working conditions for home care aides. Her employers are the seniors she cares for. Her speech was translated from Cantonese to English.

Fang said in one case the employer demanded she complete a series of unreasonable tasks.

“He wanted me to wash his old shoes and rags in the bath tub, scrub the floor and windows and the stains in the carpet. It was long hours and the tasks were not in my job description,” she said.

Further, Fang said home care aides work at the whim of their employers with no job protection.

“I helped a senior get up. One day, I was trying to get him up, I injured my arm. I told him my arm was hurting. He thought I wasn't competent and fired me. Now if I injure myself, I won't tell my employer. Otherwise, I will be fired.”

Fang said she doesn't mind the work she is supposed to do – helping seniors with their daily lives, including cleaning the house, shopping for groceries, cooking and taking them to appointments. And she wouldn't mind the pay of \$11 an hour if she could work fulltime. She pointed out that home care aides are going to be in increasing demand as the boomer population ages.

“The community will need a lot of us. But I want job security, not to be fired by the employer, to work full time and not to do chores that are not my duties. It’s not just my story. My situation happens to many families. We must organize ourselves for regular hours and a safe working environment.”

Fang said she is an activist with the Asian Immigrant Women’s Advocates, an organization that pushes for job security and safety for women immigrant workers.

The forum also addressed education, child care and unemployment. Many Chinese participants wore head phones to follow the simultaneous translation from English to Cantonese.

Jennifer Lin of East Bay Alliance Revive Oakland encouraged participants to attend city hearings on plans for the West Oakland Army Base.

“The city and port have an opportunity to bring jobs back that pay a living wage and hire local people, including jobs in construction, warehousing, mechanics and trucking. Forty cents of every \$1 for the project is public money. We need to make sure it comes back to our communities,” Lin said.

Equal Voice for America's Families is a project of the Marguerite Casey Foundation.

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