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Montgomery seeks to fight slavery of domestic servants

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The story of the frightened woman could easily have come from another century, but her disturbing testimony Thursday about being enslaved and abused as a domestic servant caught the ire of Montgomery County Council members who said they will seek legislative solutions to stop human trafficking.

Mimas Kacibure, 30, who testified before the county's Health and Human Services and Public Safety committees, said she has been abused since she came from Tanzania to work for a family in Gaithersburg.

She had hoped to earn enough money to attend college; instead, she was subjected to verbal abuse, forced to work long hours and eat separately from the family, and was never afforded the chance to go to school, she said.

From 1997 to 2002, Kacibure said she worked tirelessly, even accompanying the family on vacations - only to have more chores forced upon her. For the first two years of her enslavement, "they didn't pay me anything," she said. Later, the family paid up - a meager \$250 per month, she said.

Kacibure is currently battling to recoup her lost wages through litigation. Since she escaped the family and sought counseling with CASA of Maryland and Migrant Refugee Cultural Support Inc., her funds have dwindled to the point that she cannot afford to pay for her education at Montgomery College. She is still saving to go back to school, and working at a local bread company.

"I just wanted to go to school," she said tearfully.

The family she claimed to have worked for has since moved and could not be reached for comment. However, Butch Thayer, a friend of the Gaithersburg family, told The Examiner, "I don't believe it for a second. It's all B.S."

Her story is not an isolated incident, said Elizabeth Keyes of CASA of Maryland.



Mimas Kacibure, 30, from Tanzania, answers questions Thursday after testifying before Montgomery County's Health and Human Services Committee that she was enslaved and abused as a domestic servant. Jay Westcott/Examiner

"Every time we conduct an outreach program, we are met with more cases" of women who are brought to the United States to work as housekeepers or nannies in exchange for the opportunity to get an education, who are instead kept working extremely long hours, usually for far below the minimum wage, Keyes said.

Council Member George Leventhal, D-at large, said the county will act "in some way" to create legislation to combat human trafficking.

"This is a serious problem involving some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community," he said.

Council members are considering enacting a domestic workers' bill of rights, raising awareness programs throughout Montgomery and seeking the U.S. State Department's assistance in prosecuting individuals who would otherwise be exempt from charges of false imprisonment and slavery because they can claim diplomatic immunity.

Montgomery County police also pledged to train officers to develop a human trafficking unit, and local officials agreed they will adopt legislation to fight the emerging trend in Montgomery.

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