

Jury finds Boston-area pizza shop owner guilty of forcing immigrants to work long hours without fair pay

By **Shelley Murphy** Globe Staff, Updated June 7, 2024, 2:30 p.m.



Stash's Pizza had a closed sign posted on the front door of its Roslindale store following the arrest of owner Stavros Papantoniadis in March 2023. He was convicted of using threats of violence to force undocumented immigrants to work for him. MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

The owner of Stash's pizza shops was found guilty Friday of federal charges that he forced undocumented immigrants to work long hours without fair pay at his restaurants

around Greater Boston by using violence, intimidation, and threats to have them deported.

Stavros “Steve” Papantoniadis, 49, of Westwood, was convicted [following a two-week trial](#) in US District Court on three counts of forced labor and three counts of attempted forced labor. He was acquitted of another forced labor charge.

US District Chief Judge F. Dennis Saylor IV scheduled a Sept. 12 sentencing date for Papantoniadis, who [has been held without bail](#) since his arrest in March 2023. Defense lawyers said it’s unclear how much prison time he faces under federal sentencing guidelines.



Stash's Pizza owner Steve Papantoniadis held "A" certificate after a final inspection by the Health Division of the Inspectional Services Department on November 2, 2016. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

“The jury’s verdict sends a powerful message to employers who think they can take advantage of undocumented immigrants,” Audrey Richardson, managing attorney of


Greater Boston Legal Services Employment Law Unit, which represents five immigrant workers who testified at the trial, said in a statement.

Acting US Attorney Joshua S. Levy, whose office prosecuted the case, said in a statement, “Forced labor is a serious violation of human rights, and no one in the United States should live in fear of abuse and coercion in their workplace.”

Two of Papantoniadis’s lawyers, Steven Boozang and Carmine P. Lepore, said they were disappointed by the verdict. They cited evidence that the seven alleged victims had been in the United States illegally but were granted visas that allow them to live and work here legally after being identified as victims in the case against Papantoniadis.

“The government’s case, I think, was built on seven people who showed they had no problem saying what they had to say and fabricating things so they could attain a certain status in this country,” Lepore said.

ADVERTISING



Chadwicks Leaf Print Fit and Flare Dress,...

Chadwicks **Chadwicks** - Sponsored

[Shop](#)

“None of these people were victims,” Boozang said. “They were complete and utter opportunists.”

But prosecutors argued during the trial that Papantoniadis purposely hired workers who entered or remained in the United States illegally, knowing they feared deportation and were unlikely to report him to authorities.

Julie Dahlstrom, director of the Boston University School of Law's Immigrants' Rights and Human Trafficking Program, which represented another immigrant who testified, said the verdict was "a testament to the brave workers who came forward" and comes as the result of heightened attention to human trafficking and increased enforcement to combat it.

"Labor trafficking cases can be hard to investigate and prosecute because they depend on survivor testimony, and many survivors fear reprisals when stepping forward," Dahlstrom said in a statement.

Papantoniadis currently owns and operates pizzerias in Dorchester and Roslindale and previously operated shops in Norwood, Norwell, Randolph, Weymouth, and Wareham. Prosecutors alleged he forced undocumented immigrants to work long hours by attacking them and threatening to have them deported if they tried to quit or, in some cases, just wanted a day off.

The workers were often paid in cash and not given full pay for their overtime hours, prosecutors alleged. Prosecutors allege that seven immigrants were victimized by Papantoniadis over 15 years, starting around 2007.

"They all learned along the way that regardless of the pay, they were not free to leave without suffering serious harm," Assistant US Attorney Brian Alexander Fogerty told jurors during opening statements.

When a Salvadoran worker quit after he was refused a day off, Papantoniadis chased after him in his car and called police, falsely reporting that the worker had struck his vehicle, the prosecutor said.

But Lepore told jurors during his opening remarks that the employees wanted to work long hours to support their families back home.

“There is not one person who worked for him that didn’t walk in that door on their own and ask for a job,” he said.

The one forced labor count that Papantoniadis was acquitted of involved a worker from Egypt who alleged Papantoniadis kicked him in the genitals and knocked his teeth out with a punch.

During the trial, Tharcisio Carmo, a Brazilian native, testified that Papantoniadis “would get really pissed when someone asked for the day off.”

Carmo recounted serving as a translator in 2013 for a Brazilian worker, Tiago, who asked him to tell Papantoniadis that he wanted to quit. Papantoniadis was “pretty upset,” and Tiago told him, “You’ve got to respect me,” Carmo testified.

“Steve just punched him and grabbed him by the throat,” ripping his shirt, Carmo said.

Papantoniadis yelled at Tiago, “Come here [expletive], I’m going to break you,” Carmo told jurors.

Shelley Murphy can be reached at shelley.murphy@globe.com. Follow her [@shelleymurph](https://twitter.com/shelleymurph).



Show 103 comments