



Silicosis sufferers will suffer from new bill, workers tell Turkish president

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Workers have been staging protests in Ankara to be heard. AA photo

President Abdullah Gül met Monday with denim-industry employees fighting against a law proposal they say would negate the strides they made in seeking justice for workers suffering from silicosis.

The workers told Gül that the new regulations included in the omnibus bill currently being discussed in Parliament would put silicosis patients in the same category as the disabled, meaning that their social assistance from the government would plummet to almost nothing.

"Silicosis is an occupational illness, and therefore should not be considered a disability," the workers said in their letter addressed to the president. The delegation added that the move would wipe out the gains they had made over the last three years.

The Health Ministry has banned sandblasting jeans, which is often responsible for the silicosis, and has helped out existing patients, the Denim Sandblasting Workers Solidarity Committee wrote in their statement letter to Gül.

The presentation to Gül also included a legal report by Professor Ömer Ekmekçi of the Istanbul University Law School and Professor Zeki Kılıçaslan of the Istanbul University Medical School.



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"Silicosis can only be caught when being exposed to silica powder in a work environment. It is not practically possible to catch it outside of the workplace," Kılıçaslan said in his medical report.

Ekmekçi, in his legal report, said the government was taking positive steps by considering sandblasting workers, but added that the current draft made no contributions to silicosis patients.

An increasingly popular practice over the past 20 years, sandblasting is used in many different denim-producing countries as a finishing method to produce a faded look for jeans and other clothing products.

The most common occupational lung disease in the world, silicosis is often contracted by workers engaged in sandblasting jeans without proper ventilation or protection. It is non-curable and can be fatal. According to medical reports from Turkey, sandblasting operators can develop an acute form of silicosis in just six to 24 months of work.