

Faces of the Employee Free Choice Act

Chinazo Okolo

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Enduring Tough Conditions

For the past 10 years, Chinazo Okolo has worked as a customer service representative in Louisiana at the company now known as AT&T Mobility, formerly Cingular Wireless/BellSouth Mobility. Though other employees within the company had union representation, Chinazo and her coworkers did not. "Our bosses took full advantage" of the lack of unionization at her workplace, says Chinazo, by arbitrarily and inconsistently applying rules that put workers at the whim of "capricious" managers.

Finding a Voice

Following a company merger, the confusing and haphazard management practices escalated. Chinazo had to take a large pay cut at the same time her insurance premiums increased drastically. Schedules were changed without notice. Even worse, other employees were fired for seemingly no reason at all, and had no recourse.

In 2001, Chinazo and her coworkers approached Communications Workers of America (CWA) about organizing a union. "We wanted a clear and precise contract, and we wanted to be protected from managers making arbitrary decisions," says Chinazo. "We also wanted to have a voice at work when the company was making decisions that affected us." Despite the treatment the workers had endured previously, they were able to organize relatively quickly – under a neutrality agreement with CWA, the company did not interfere in the organizing campaign and pledged to recognize a union if a majority of workers signed cards.

Why We Need the Employee Free Choice Act

"We are among a fortunate, small number of American workers who have been able to organize a union without interference from management. Unfortunately, most American workers don't have the same opportunity we did, and that's why we need the Employee Free Choice Act," says Chinazo.

"This bill supports all things American – the essential concepts of freedom and justice – and it's crucial to maintaining job satisfaction for America's workforce and to keeping jobs in America," notes Chinazo. "The Scripture says that 'a workman is worthy of his wages' and that workers should be treated fairly by employers. As a supporter of the Employee Free Choice Act, my response is a resounding amen!"

