

Faces of the Employee Free Choice Act

Joe Ann Fowler

Certified Nursing Assistant
Wilmot, AR

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Providing Dedicated Care

Joe Ann Fowler was married with two children in grade school when she learned that a local nursing home would pay for her training to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) if she committed to at least six months of employment. So in 1999 Joe Ann received her license and went to work at Lake Village Healthcare Center in Wilmot, AR. Working with about 80 residents, some of whom were entirely bed-ridden, Joe Ann became dedicated to their daily care. "Knowing that could be me one day, I want to do what I can to care for our patients and make their day a little bit better," says Joe Ann.

Standing Up to Earn Respect

In 2000, Joe Ann and her coworkers became concerned about changes made by new administrators that limited their voice in patient care and made working conditions unfair – and even unsafe. After doing some research, Joe Ann came to believe that organizing a union would improve their workplace. "I found a union would stand with you, no matter what, and that's when I started asking my coworkers to stand with me in organizing a union," explains Joe Ann.

The management at Lake Village tried to talk employees out of joining a union, telling them that the union would "take their money and kick them to the curb." They also threatened layoffs and tried to bribe workers with raises if they would vote against the union. Ultimately, Joe Ann and her coworkers successfully formed a union in the summer of 2001, although it still took another year and a half before they had their first contract. Working conditions improved noticeably. "With the union, everything is better, especially because we're treated with more respect," says Joe Ann.

Why We Need the Employee Free Choice Act

Joe Ann still serves as a union steward for her workplace, representing employees on many different matters. She knows that too many of her coworkers, including herself, still struggle with healthcare costs, and she hopes to negotiate to improve their benefits and modernize some of their equipment.

She believes the Employee Free Choice Act will help other workers avoid the obstacles she faced when forming a union. "Under the Employee Free Choice Act, it will be your choice to organize – you won't have to sneak around and worry about the company threatening you," she says. "Having union representation has kept me at my job. I can't stand before Congress because I don't have that chance, but the union is our voice that will speak for us when we can't speak for ourselves."

