

## Faces of the Employee Free Choice Act

# Sara Steffens

Former Journalist  
Oakland, CA

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### Finding Success in Journalism

It was during college that Sara Steffens discovered her love of writing, so when she graduated in 1994 and became a print journalist, no one was surprised. "There is something incredibly meaningful about writing for papers," says Sara. "So many people see what you do and you really have the chance to have an impact." Before landing at the Contra Costa Times in California, where she reported on poverty and social services, Sara had worked at several community papers.

### Organizing a Union – and Losing a Job

But after eight years at the Times, in the winter of 2007, Sara made a decision that would soon derail her promising career as a newspaper reporter. She began to talk seriously with her coworkers about organizing a union in their newsroom through the Newspaper Guild and the Communications Workers of America. "We weren't after big raises or anything like that," says Sara. "We wanted to work with management to improve things." Over the next six months Sara, the mother of an 18-month-old daughter, devoted much of her free time to organizing the union campaign. In June 2008, the vote to form a union was successful.

Management at the Contra Costa Times had tried unsuccessfully to block the union. Two weeks after the vote, the company announced a round of layoffs. But rather than being based on merit, seniority, or salary, these layoffs targeted positions the company "no longer needed." To Sara and her colleagues this was clearly an attempt to retaliate against union activists. Within a matter of just a few weeks, Sara and 28 others – about two-thirds of whom were union members – had all lost their jobs.

### Why We Need the Employee Free Choice Act

Eight months after losing her job, Sara believes the Employee Free Choice Act would have made a significant difference in her life. "Everything would have been different," she says. "There would have been real deterrents and strong punishments for retaliating against us for union activity."

"I'm passionate about the need for reform," explains Sara. "The system is broken – not just because of what happened to me but because of what can happen to anyone trying to unionize. It doesn't need to be an adversarial relationship. A union could be the best thing for a company if they take the time to give the employees a chance."

