

## Faces of the Employee Free Choice Act

# Zeldia Manning

Former Poultry Plant Worker  
Dermott, AR

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### Striving for Better Conditions

In 2004, Zeldia Manning, a mother of eight and grandmother to numerous grandchildren, began working at H&L Poultry Processing, where she prepared chicken wings for packaging. More than 300 workers were employed at the southeastern Arkansas plant, which was the second largest employer in town. However, Zeldia and many of her coworkers became increasingly concerned by numerous hikes in their insurance premiums, cuts to benefits, and changes to the employee attendance policy.

### Facing Retaliation

In response to those concerns, Zeldia and her coworkers began to consider forming a union at their plant in March 2008. They also hoped to obtain better wages and looked forward to working under the stability of a contract. Company management retaliated by undertaking an anti-union propaganda campaign, holding one-on-one meetings with employees and even firing many workers. Though a majority of the workers signed union authorization cards, the company refused to allow an election.

The plant ceased operations in October 2008 with little warning. Employees were told on a Thursday that a contract had expired with a key distributor, but didn't expect the doors would be closed to them when they came to work on Friday. Workers received no severance pay and their insurance was cut off. Though there are reports that the plant may reopen soon, many fear that management will only rehire employees who were not involved in the union effort.

### Why We Need the Employee Free Choice Act

“The intimidation we faced when we tried to organize shows how far employers can go to prevent workers from forming a union to improve their lives and take better care of their families,” says Zeldia, who was a member of the organizing committee. “It's simply wrong and we should not have to endure that kind of treatment. We need laws that better protect all American workers.”

“Strong workers make a strong economy that benefits everyone. When employers put down their workers like they did to us when we tried to form a union, it hurts everyone,” says Zeldia. “As American workers, I think we should have a free choice in how we form a union. No employer has the right to dictate that to us. The choice should be left up to the workers.”

