

**Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions, United States House
of Representatives**

**Hearing on *"Strengthening America's Middle Class Through the Employee Free
Choice Act"***

February 8, 2007

Statement by Teresa Joyce, Cingular worker and CWA union member

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, good morning and thank you for inviting me to participate in this important hearing on workers' rights. My name is Teresa Joyce and I am a customer care representative with Cingular Wireless in Lebanon, Virginia. I have a good union job that pays well and provides affordable healthcare benefits for my family and me. However, it wasn't always this way. Four years ago, before Cingular took over, AT&T Wireless owned our call center -- and it was a very different experience.

Under AT&T, our health care benefits were costly, wages were stagnant and supervisors treated us with very little respect. I knew it didn't have to be this way. For 23 years, my husband had mined the Appalachian Mountains and was a proud member of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Through his union, my husband was able to bargain for better wages, health insurance and improved safety equipment for the miners. As a result, we were able to live a comfortable, middle-class life and raise three happy and healthy children. I knew the difference a union could make and I knew that to improve conditions at the call center, we too, would need a union.

At AT&T Wireless, we had absolutely no say on workplace conditions, including wages and benefits. Our raises were determined by favoritism and seldom a reflection of our work. Some years, we would receive as little as a two-cent increase. On top of this,

workers had no real means for reporting unfair treatment by supervisors. When we approached upper management about unfair treatment and inadequate pay, our requests fell on deaf ears. Frustrated with the companies' neglect and indifference, my co-workers and I decided to come together to form a union with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) to bargain for fair raises, affordable health care benefits and respect at work.

Once word reached management that we were trying to organize, they did everything they could to stop us from exercising our right to form a union. Our supervisors constantly threatened that AT&T Wireless would leave our town and that we would lose our jobs. They also claimed that if we did succeed with our organizing efforts, our union dues would be so enormous we may actually need two jobs.

My co-workers and I would distribute union flyers in our break room and place posters on the walls with information about the union. Supervisors would immediately gather the information and dispose of it. Management wanted to deny other workers the opportunity to make an informed, educated decision on whether or not to join a union. They wanted to control the information workers received and instill fear through constant threats and lies about the union. At one point, one of the managers went so far as to park her car at the front entrance of a building where my co-workers and I were holding a union meeting. Deeper into our organizing campaign, management began to drive out our most outspoken union supporters for so-called "bad attitudes" and other flimsy charges.

Despite the company's on-going intimidation tactics, we continued our organizing efforts. Having had past experience with unions and knowing what a difference they could make, I was especially active in the fight to unionize at AT&T Wireless.

Months into our organizing struggle, we heard that Cingular Wireless was going to purchase AT&T Wireless. At some point during the merger, several co-workers and I sat in on a conference call with Cingular Wireless executives to talk about what the merger would mean for former AT&T Wireless employees. When asked about our organizing efforts, Cingular CEO, Stan Sigmund, revealed he had a good relationship with CWA and assured us that each AT&T Wireless call center employee would be able to choose whether or not they wanted union representation, free of employer interference. I was overjoyed. It was a relief to know that we could finally speak openly about the union without the fear of employer retaliation.

Shortly afterwards, the harassment and intimidation stopped. We were free to distribute union literature to other workers during our break and were even allowed to set up a table in the break room with information on CWA. We made posters, put out flyers and made phone calls about the benefits of joining a union and having a say on wages and work conditions. In 2005, a majority of us voted for the union by signing authorization cards and on Sept 6th, 2005 we were officially recognized as CWA members. Management even helped us arrange a cookout at the call center to celebrate.

Today, supervisors treat us with respect. We've been able to bargain for fair wage increases and affordable health care benefits. Our wages are now determined by a wage scale, not favoritism. We have more vacation days and - more importantly - we have job security.

Cases such as mine, where the employer agrees to take no position and allow their workers' to freely choose whether or not they want a union, are few and far between. The reality is that every 23 minutes, a worker is illegally fired or discriminated against for exercising her human and constitutional right to form a union. I had two uncles sacrifice their lives for this great country during World War II. I lost a cousin in the war in Iraq. I have another cousin in Afghanistan and my daughter, Laura, and her husband serve in the US Navy. Every day they risk their lives to protect our freedoms. Every day they work to spread democratic principles and values to audiences abroad. It's outrageous and it's shameful when the very freedoms they fight to preserve are the very freedoms that are routinely trampled on, here, at home.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, there is something terribly wrong with our laws and with our country, when workers are systematically harassed, threatened and even fired from their jobs - stripped of their very livelihood - for the simple act of exercising their right to form a union to improve their lives. As a country that prides itself on our rights and freedoms, we must take immediate action to restore workers' most basic liberties at the workplace.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify at this hearing.