



*Communications
Workers of America*

*The Connecticut Union
of
Telephone Workers, Inc.*



Local 1298

AFL-CIO

3055 Dixwell Avenue • Hamden, CT 06518 • (203) 288-5271 • Toll Free (800) 833-2889

Testimony of Richard Benham

Labor and Public Employees Committee

February 24, 2011

HB 6406

Good afternoon Senator Prague and Representative Zalaski and distinguished members of the Labor and Public employees committee

My name is Rich Benham. I am Department Vice President for the Communications Workers of America Local 1298. I represent 400 Customer Information Services specialist's who work for a very large telecommunications company. Another term for the above job title is an Operator.

I speak in favor of raised bill HB6406

I would like to tell you a personal story of an experience I had with my manager after I used 3 sick days within a one week period.

As background, I was hired by this large telecommunication in 2000 in the network side of the business. I was designated for layoff in late 2002. I was fortunate to be offered a job as a "competitive" operator, a job titled that is now know as CIS specialist. As a specialist, I would take on the average of 800 to 1000, 411 information wireless calls a day. Currently the cost is \$2.00 per call plus airtime, a specialist generates good revenue for the company.

When I was in the network side of the contract, I was contractually eligible for 20 short period sickness days, 10 for each year. I only used 3 days during those 2 years. One would figure that I was a good employee I only used sick days as they are defined, when I was feeling sick.

That all changed when I became an operator. In my new job, I was eligible for only 5 sick days

After about 4 months as an operator I came down with a bug that kept me out of work for 2 days. I then thought that I was able to come back to work which I did but the following day I was still sick and I had to take another day off. I then recovered to go back to work on the next day.

About halfway thru that next day, my supervisor tapped me on my shoulder and said to finish the call and come see her. I wondered what's up. I found out soon when entering her office I was told that she had to have a general discussion with me which is the first step of discipline in our contract about me being out sick those three days

When I questioned her about my previous sick day history with the company she said it didn't matter and that if I continued to call out sick she would have to advance me on the discipline path which could lead up to termination.

The reason I am telling you this story is because a lot of my coworkers often feel the way I felt that day, harassed, threatened and down right scared of losing their job

This management style is growing more and more as each day passes. Returning to work after an illness to sit down in a "Welcome Back" meeting with your manager and then hear the dreaded 7 word phrase "BE THANKFUL THAT YOU HAVE A JOB". Is simply wrong.

AND - this all occurred as a bargained for employee, a worker with a Union contract. It is frightening to imagine what happens to the employee that does not have a voice in the work place. Thank you for listening to my story and if you have any questions I would be glad to answer them at this time.